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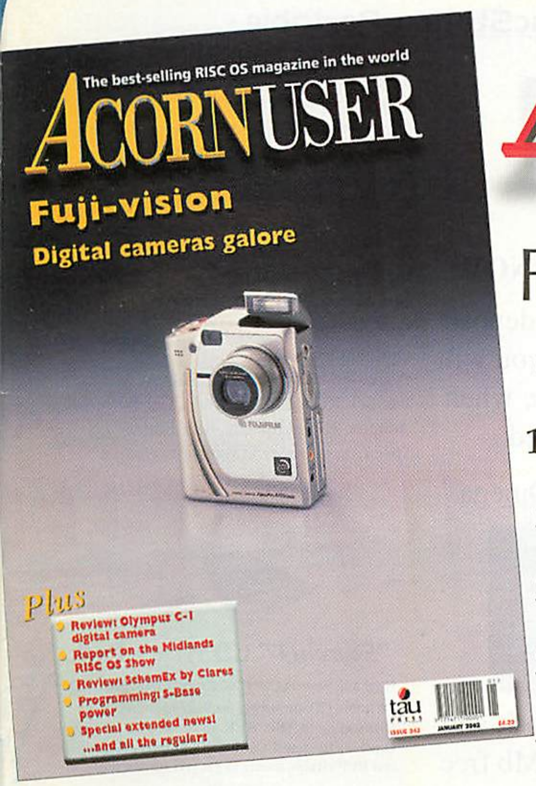
- Review: Olympus C-1 digital camera
- Report on the Midlands RISC OS Show
- Review: SchemEx by Clares
- Programming: S-Base power
- Special extended news!
- ...and all the regulars

tau PRESS
9 771471 100001 01
ISSUE 242 JANUARY 2002 £4.20

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January 2002

ACORN USER



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February 2002 issue on sale 30th January 2002



It is one of those interesting quirks of time that if I had chosen a slightly different path I would never have worked for the Open University as a programmer and, in 1981, would not have encountered the BBC Micro; and from there moved to The Micro User magazine, Acorn Computing and finally to Acorn User.

But there comes a time when, no matter how much of a wrench it is, one must hand over to another and that time has come for Acorn User and me. Tau Press is expanding and I must give the responsibility of the Acorn User editorship to another. And that other, in this case, is Michael Stubbs.

I've known Michael for a few years and he is as dedicated to the market as I am, he has started his own business based round RISC OS just as I did.

We are entering a new era, *Acorn User* will be re-designed for the next issue and Tau Press is undertaking major promotional actions in and out of the market pushing the magazine and the operating system.

You are important and so are your needs, at the back of this issue is a survey, take time to fill it in and return it so that we can know what it is you want from Acorn User.

And we will try to provide it.



Published by

tau PRESS

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Subscriptions:
(+44/0) 161 429 8902
E-mail: subscrip@acornuser.com
13 issue subscription rate: £45.99 (UK),
£51.99 (EU), £63.99 (World)

Acorn User is available as speech from the Talking Newspaper Association UK

Internet Services provided by Real Ingenuity, www.realingenuity.net

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Riscstation gambles on sub-notebook

RiscStation's long-awaited laptop is to be a subnotebook, priced at the lower end of the laptop market. Starting at £999 + VAT and available from February, the machine will provide low-cost computing on the move without being an entire desktop replacement and is likely to compete against higher-end Pocket PCs as well as PCs. The machine will be available with an optional docking station, providing CD-ROM and floppy disc drives, and serial, parallel, VGA and PS/2 ports.

Weighing only 1.3Kg, the machine is very light and more suited to the regular mover than many laptops. The casing is made from a magnesium alloy casing. RiscStation has opted for a 8.4" TFT screen with a maximum resolution of 800x600, which has led to some criticism within the Acorn market. However, this resolution is in pretty standard use among Mac users and not uncommon among Windows users. The screen is a touchscreen, although RiscStation has also included a conventional glidepad. The processor is an ARM7500 running at 56MHz. As with all computers, not everyone will be happy.

Those wanting a laptop for graphics work will be disappointed by its screen modes, and those needing the fastest speed may be disappointed by the lack of a StrongARM processor. Nevertheless, as a low-cost replacement for the Acorn A4, many will warmly welcome the new RiscStation machine.

Deposits of £100 are now being accepted for the machines. RiscStation is on 01942 797777, or the Web **www.riscstation.co.uk**

New C++ Compiler

Programming RISC OS machines has become easier with the launch of *EasyGCC*, a free C++ compiler available from Melotech. The software includes a project manager that allows complete control over your source code files and how they are compiled and stored; a library manager that allows complete control over your libraries; a macro editor that allows easy editing of your source code; and a compiler installer and checker that will make sure you're getting the most out of GCC.

Much criticism has been piled at the door of Acorn and RISC OS Ltd about the state of development tools, and the availability of a free compiler that is also easy to operate is a great step forward. Further information is available from **www.melotech.co.uk**

Solo to take third world by storm

Acorn stalwart, ExpLAN, has released prototype mark II of Solo, its transportable RISC OS computer, which *Acorn User* has learned has attracted significant interest from multinational aid agencies. Such agencies are looking for such a machine for their own staff working in developing countries, and as a way of kick-starting the economy in disaster areas.

The Solo is designed to be built in developing countries and can be produced outside of traditional factory setting.

It is also thought that the machines will be used by missionaries using ExpLAN's HolyBible software, the most advanced Bible software for any platform.

Traditional Windows PCs are not ideal for many regions in less developed countries. Firstly, there is not the IT infrastructure available to support the machines, such as to reinstall Windows and so forth. Secondly, PCs use up too much electricity. In many parts of the world, electricity may only be on for one hour a day.

The Solo uses solar power in order to keep the machine usable even when the power goes down, or where there is no electricity supply. It can also run on wind-power or a clockwork generator. Remarkably, the case is wooden, with optional outer layer of Dibond aluminium composite (Alusuisse).



ExpLAN is looking to train up local villages to build machines for themselves on a licensing scheme. According to ExpLAN's Paul Richardson, licensees will have to pay a nominal $1 licence to manufacture, along with paying for each set of operating system chips, and for three to four weeks' training.

The mark II prototype uses an ARM7500 processor, although there will be an ARM9 option on production models. The screen is a 14.1" touchscreen with a maximum resolution of 1024x768 with mouse buttons built-in to it. However, smaller screens will be available as options where lower power consumption is a necessity

Acorn User Relaunch

Next month sees the exciting re-launch of *Acorn User*, the world's best selling RISC OS magazine. The results of the recent survey have been analysed and many changes have already been implemented, with more to follow. The new magazine features a brand new look and improved content, with many more words per page giving you even better value for money.

In line with the relaunch, the team at *Acorn User* has changed and expanded. Michael Stubbs has been appointed as the new Editor and Steve Langley takes up the position of Marketing Manager.

Michael commented; "I am delighted to be able to take up the post of Editor of Acorn User and appreciate all the good wishes I've received. This is a very exciting time in the RISC OS market and I am extremely confident about the future. We've listened to readers' comments and have taken steps to make *Acorn User* a must-read magazine. After the relaunch in February, readers will notice more and more improvements and additions."

Alex Singleton has been appointed as News Editor and a number of new writers have now joined the *Acorn User* team.

If you haven't yet filled in your survey you still can, the questions are given in the Letters page at the back of the magazine. To ensure the changes we make are the right ones we will be consulting you on a regular basis so make sure you let us know what you think.



David Pilling Web site update

David Pilling has relaunched his Web site at **www.davidpilling.net**. The Web site has been totally redesigned and restructured to allow users easier access to the information they want.

Packed full of goodies, David's site features information on *Ovation Pro*, *ImageMaster* and the rest of his excellent range of commercial software.

In addition to this, there is a range of free software to download and a very comprehensive resource section for users of *Ovation Pro*. Impression users who have not yet made the switch to *Ovation Pro* can download a demonstration version of the software from the Web site.

(8.4" and 10.4" running at 800x600 resolution, and 12.1" and 13.3" running at 1024x768). The Solo can be used either with a conventional keyboard or with an on-screen keyboard (making use of the touchscreen).

The Solo's storage is by CompactFlash in addition to the operating system being in ROM. Additionally, ExpLAN is using IBM Microdrives to provide up to 1Gb of storage externally. There will also be PCMCIA and USB ports in the production models, although they are not functioning in the prototypes.

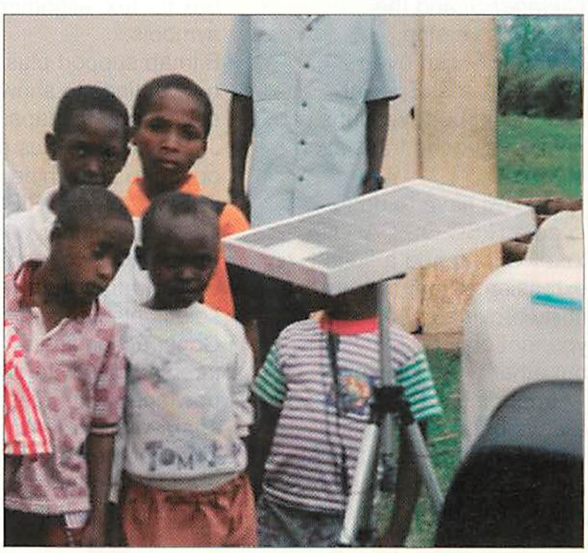
The solar panel is made of polycrystalline or amorphous silicon. Polycrystalline is more efficient when under direct sunlight, but amorphous silicon is more tolerant of mixed weather conditions. The panels should be able to power the Solo and also put energy away into a storage battery for overnight use, although the prototypes require two solar panel units, production models may only require one.

ExpLAN suggests that the solar panels will cost around £100. In the event of a complete power failure, the computer will give warnings to the user: if these are ignored, the computer will save documents and shut down the computer.

It is expected that aid agencies with the machines will use them for information retrieval, perhaps dumping the content of an intranet onto the machines, allowing people in the field access to information.

The machine is expected to be seen as more appropriate than traditional laptops because it had a ruggedised design, thereby making it ideal for harsh and demanding environments.

Further information from **www.explan.co.uk**



Commercial customers flock to RISC OS

Niche, commercial customers are becoming the biggest purchasers of Acorn computers, according to Castle Technology. Among many uses, they are becoming used as museum booths, for controlling specialised instrumentation and for displaying realtime news in hotel foyers. The latter use generally involves an A7000+ and a modem, which collects the news regularly from a central computer. For such commercial customers, Acorn computers are ideal, providing low-maintenance machines. Castle's new range of embedded computers, Neuron, are ideal development platforms for this kind of use, allowing RISC OS machines to be placed inside displays and very small cases. According to Castle, many such customers have no need for printer ports or floppy drives in their machines, but are very conscious of space and cost.

CAD as CAD CAM

A brand-new version of *ProCAD+* has just been released. this is an exciting step becuase it makes *ProCAD+* more accessible to schools.

One of the main reasons why many schools had not used *ProCAD+* was because it was not available for PC's. Well now it is. *wProCAD+* for Windows has just been released and the upgrade of the RISC OS version is largely to improve the sharing of drawings between the two systems.

For instance, ProCAD+ version 1.03 can now import and render bitmaps (.BMP files) without using *ChangeFSI* and the Windows version, *wProCAD+* can even render sprites! Special features in both versions help resolve the translation of fonts.

All you have to do to send a RISC OS CAD file to a PC is to add a '.cad' extension. There is even a utility provided to do this for you; not only for CAD files but other types as well.

Importing a PC file has always been easy as the DOSMap command takes care of the conversion so just adding the command DOSMap CAD C33 will sort out CAD file typing.

Below is a brief list of features added since the release of Version 1.02:

- New User Function Box of up to 768 programmable keys. Can show user sprites or text on keys.
- New sprites and long filename support for RISC OS 4.
- New Stretch feature optional aspect ratio lock.
- New Compass °N angle mode for angles measured from 90° clockwise.
- New Sym button added to the Text tool dialogue box for text alignment to symbols.
- Bitmap support plus two new options to show/hide sprites and bitmaps.
- JPEG support plus new option to show/hide JPEGs. (Needs RISC OS 3.5 or higher.)
- Snaps now work on visible rather than selectable items.
- Construction line intersections with objects now snap with Intercept snap.
- Layer names are now preserved during DrawPlus file import.
- New preference switch to use mm rather than scaled values for setting line widths.
- More information reported in Item Info. including lengths and areas of multiple selections and within groups.
- Euro symbols added to ProCAD+ & Plotter+ (ASCII 128)
- PC TrueType font name interpreter added to ProCAD+ and Plotter+.
- New Angle± box in Geometric tool for use with Normal to offset lines.
- New View layers option in Zoom menu to disable layers on a per-view basis.
- New transformation functions with values changeable through parameters.
- Dozens of new numbered functions. (Full list in new manual.)
- New up-to-date 182 page colour manual.

This simple list does not tell the whole story. JPEG support: This means that you can now drop a JPEG file onto a drawing as you could for a sprite and zoom in and pan over it. The rendering uses the routines

In brief

Risc PC and A7000 cases to stay

The now-traditional cases of the Risc PC and A7000 are to remain "for the foreseeable future" even though the internals will change, according to Castle. The cases, which have been in used since 1994 and 1995 respectfully have each received acclaim.

The Risc PC case was designed by the same company that designed the BBC Micro, and the A7000 case was originally a Mark I Online Media set-top-box. However, while both cases are widely respected, they are seen in some quarters as slightly dated and perhaps current users would be less likely to upgrade to a new computer that shares the same case, if only for physiological reasons.

New network card

Faster network cards are being designed by Castle Technology in two formats, for traditional Acorn podules and also for the Network Interface Card slot (which appears on machines like the Risc PC). The network cards will mean that for the first time RISC OS machines will be able to take part on 100BaseT networks, rather than running the slower 10BaseT protocol.

For many years RISC OS machines have been able to run on PC networks, through software such as OmniClient and Warm Silence Software's LanMan98. The faster network cards will be an encouragement for schools and businesses networking RISC OS machines.

Prophet still cuts it

A new version of the leading PC business accounting package QuickBooks is to be released in January, but that does not seem to shatter Acorn users' dependence on Prophet, the accounts package from accountz.com.

One Acorn User reader

Continued...

available in RISC OS 3.5 and above. If it can't be rendered it will appear as a rectangle with the diagonals drawn in. You can select a JPEG on a drawing and save it as a file, as for a sprite.

You can now import and export Draw files containing JPEGs and they will be dealt with correctly. The printing of JPEGs depends on the abilities of your printer driver.

All registered users will have received notification of the upgrade. Up to now all upgrades to ProCAD+ have been free and it is still possible to obtain this upgrade for free, but if you would like the new colour manual then a fee will apply.

To find out more, visit David Snell's Web site at: **www.zynet.co.uk/dsnell** or telephone 01392 214033

Castle heaps praise on Simtec

Castle Technology has endorsed Simtec's forthcoming USB interface amid hints that it may drop its own development project. According to Castle's Managing Director, Jack Lillingston, "The Simtec implementation is good news for the whole market." He revealed that Castle had been in negotiations with Simtec about licensing Simtec's design, and that negotiations were going well.

Regardless, the Castle implementation will be completely compatible with the Simtec version. Meanwhile, *Acorn User* has learned that Simtec has been commissioning USB drivers from third-parties, including an update to *!Printers*, which will make RISC OS users able to use USB printers for the first time.

However, there is some concern within the industry that MicroDigital has not released the API for its own USB protocol, which means that programmers outside of MicroDigital will not know how to write drivers for the MicroDigital ports. One developer commented, "I do hope Microdigital's system works the same way. Otherwise the only hardware that will work with their machines will be one's MicroDigital writes drivers for itself."

and thus will not be approved". The csaa newsgroup is for RISC OS news and announcements and is an important resource for users and reporters alike.

Bob Pollard 1947 - 2001

We are very sad to report the death of Bob Pollard, Chief Programmer of Icon Technology and author of the much-loved programs, TechWriter and EasiWriter. Mike Glover revealed that Bob had been suffering a long illness and passed away on Saturday 1st December. Bob leaves a widow, Reena. Acorn User extends deepest sympathies to those at Icon Technology and Bob's family.

DigitalCD development continues

André Timmins has been busy updating DigitalCD, moving Web hosts and redesigning his Web site! The DigitalCD URL, www.digitalcd.riscos.org.uk, now points to André's new Web site on the new servers. DigitalCD itself has been updated and is now at version 2.53. New for this version is:

DCDUtils, with a largely improved FFT (more precise, faster, a selectable number of input points, frequency dividers) and bug fixes including in SoundDriver support.

- Version 1.36 of AMPlayer.
- New faster version of AudioMPEG.

The Sonogram plug-in has gained new options, mostly related to cope with the extensions made in DCDUtils and the TimVis plug-in now has the option to display samples names/instruments names/comments in either the system font or a PC one.

For the uninitiated, DigitalCD is a desktop music player compatible with RISC OS 3.1 or later (including StrongARM). It provides independent control panels for any connected CD drive and music files playlists. It's main features are:

- Support for Mods, ArcTrackers, Digital Symphonies, Matrix, MTM, ULT, PTM, S3M, XM, IT and MP3 files.
- Support for Armadeus, Wave (WAV), Sun Audio (AU), Audioworks, Psion A-law, AIFF, Infocom and Creative voice (VOC) sample formats.
- Support for Midi.
- Support for CD playing with built in CD database allowing you

Continued...

In brief

commented, "The problem with QuickBooks and all the other PC packages is that it takes vastly more time to do a set of accounts. Prophet is designed with speed of use in mind." Prophet was considered revolutionary at its release over ten years ago as it permitted users to make corrections to errors in the same way as in a spreadsheet or database.

Now many small business packages on other platforms allow the same, but none with the simplicity of Prophet. The current version, Prophet 3 Professional, is available for purchase online from **www.accountz.com**

Speakers

The IT industry norm is to supply computers with small, tinny speakers that are plugged directly into the back of the computer. However, if you want your RISC OS machine's sound capabilities to shine through, you need to plug it into an external amp and hi-fi speakers.

Discount retailer Richer Sounds sells cables which connect into the headphone socket of a computer and then into the back of an amplifier. At the time of writing, it is selling Cambridge Audio amplifiers for £69.95 and a pair of Mission bookshelf speakers for £59.95. More information from **www.richersounds.com**

RISC OS evangelism

A survey conducted by Internet knowledgebase **riscos.org** shows that 38% of the site's visitors have introduced at least one person RISC OS in a particular week. Some visitors are particularly keen with 8.1% introducing over 10 people. According to the site, "Beginners and experts alike can immediately start to use RISC OS, even with little or no previous experience of computers.

Soon users are finding out what all the excitement and enthusiasm is about. RISC OS is not just hype. It's the

Continued...

RISC OS SELECT

Make the right choice for the future with

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Keep up to date with every new version of RISC OS as it appears!

In future, new updates to RISC OS will be soft-loaded over the existing RISC OS 4 ROM. Distribution will be on CD and via the Internet, making regular updates and the widespread testing of new features far more practical. Join **Select** to be a part of the new scheme and receive up to three RISC OS update CDs per year. All you will need is one or more RISC OS 4 machines on which to install new versions of RISC OS 4.

What does the Select scheme provide?

By joining **Select** you will receive the following benefits:

1. Up to three CDs per year, containing the latest version of RISC OS plus optional beta-test copies of software components in development. Every CD will also be bootable and contain a full, working disc image that allows the easy selection of different boot sequences.
2. Access to interim updates via a private Web site.
3. The ability to upgrade up to **ten** machines at a single site.

Select is a personal scheme: you only need one subscription even if you own several computers. However, RISC OS 4 is needed for each machine: **Select** cannot be used with RISC OS 3·7 or earlier.

4. **Affiliate Registered Developer** status: if you are a programmer, joining **Select** entitles you to become a Registered Developer for no extra charge, and have your products included in the Database section of **Foundation RISC User** magazine (see below).

RISC OS 4 upgrades and Select scheme prices

Subscriptions to **Select** are available on an annual basis, and may be purchased in combination with a RISC OS 4 upgrade.

RISC OS 4 upgrade plus Select subscription:	**£179**
RISC OS 4 upgrade only *(new low price!)*:	**£109**
Select subscription only: *(for existing RISC OS 4 users)*	**£105**
Select subscription only: *(for Foundation members)*	**£99**
Select group subscription: *(for sites with more than ten machines)*	**£300**

All prices above include VAT.

Please see our Web site for further pricing details, overseas prices etc.

RISC OS 4+

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FOUNDATION RISC User



Now in volume 2!

Foundation RISC User is a truly innovative publication from RISCOS Ltd that supports the heart of the RISC OS market. The magazine articles combine useful information with software resources that can be launched with a simple click on a link. Every issue is packed with a wide range of substantial and authoritative features from respected writers, along with a comprehensive and fully integrated database of current RISC OS products, developers and user groups. Altogether, it's arguably the most innovative and high quality CD magazine on any platform.

Testimonials from readers of Foundation RISC User

- "The interface is very friendly and better than my perception of what a CD-based magazine would be like!"—*Andrew Weston*
- "The whole CD is a joy, and something our platform can be proud of."—*Geoff Steeper*
- "The Foundation CD has contradicted my opinion that I wouldn't be able to read a CD magazine happily. It's very nicely laid out."—*Fred Bambrough*
- "Congratulations on Foundation RISC User… it works smoothly, looks good and has masses of useful and interesting content."—*Gavin Wraith*
- "Keep up the excellent work! (And what I REALLY appreciate is someone who can write, spell, talk sense, and knows his its-es and it's-es!)"—*Jeremy Roberts*
- "It's a really excellent job."—*David Pilling*

Sample Foundation RISC User Online!

Visit our sampler edition, **Foundation RISC User Online**, at http://foundation.riscos.com/fru.htm

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www.riscos.com
sales@riscos.com

to name the CD and CD tracks you are listening to. CD and track names can be retrieved from the net with the help of AcornCD 0.19.
• Support for playlists.
• Mini-bars, i.e. small versions of the control panels.
• Skins to provide an alternative look and feel for the control panels and mini-bars.
• Visualisation Plug-ins to provide full-screen or desktop (windowed) animation of sound played through the sound DMA buffers.

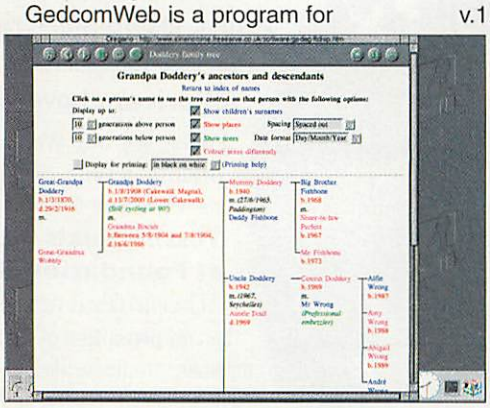
Amazingly, DigitalCD is freeware. Along with a range of plugins and skins,

Genealogy software updated

Hilary Phillips has announced that GedcomWeb 2.02 is now available for download from **www.sinenomine.freeserve.co.uk/software/**

Version 2.02 contains a few improvements over 2.00 including better support for files exported from !Family, people without surnames, and warning for overwriting files.

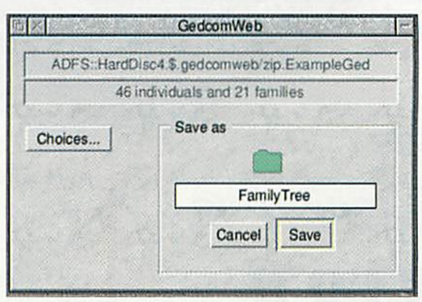
GedcomWeb is a program for genealogists. It converts GEDCOM files (as exported from Family, Roots, Ancestor and so on) into JavaScript-based Web pages.



Even if you don't want to display your family tree on the Web, the output is still very useful for sending to relations who may not have genealogy software, as it will work with any modern Web browser on any type of computer. It's also very handy for printing family trees. See the Web page for further details on how to purchase a full copy and for an example of the output which can be viewed online.

More good news for those with an interest in genealogy: Hilary Philips has announced the availability of Prune v.1.00, which is now available from **www.sinenomine.freeserve.co.uk/software/**

Prune is a program for genealogists, to cut out parts of GEDCOM files. It was designed for use in conjunction with GedcomWeb, to enable you to cut out living people or disreputable ancestors from your family tree before publishing the information on the World Wide Web. It is also useful for pruning GEDCOM files which your relations have sent you, to cut out people from their tree who are no relation of yours.



Emulator tool gets update

Matthew Phillips has announced the immediate availability of version 1.01 of DiscImage. It is available for download from **www.sinenomine.freeserve.co.uk/software/**

DiscImage is for producing disc image files from floppy discs. Image files can be produced from any floppy disc recognised by the operating system, and also Amstrad CPC and some Einstein disc formats. The image files can be produced in several different formats, including DSK and EDSK.

Image files are popular for use with computer emulators. DiscImage will allow you to produce images of standard RISC OS discs for use with RISC OS emulators, and also images of "foreign" disc formats for use with emulators of other computers running under RISC OS.

Matthew commented; "Future versions of DiscImage may be extended to allow images to be written back to floppy disc. If you are interested in this feature, let me know."

In brief

productive future of desktop computing. Once you've used RISC OS for a few weeks you'll never want to go back to using alternative systems."

Banner Network

Andrew Duffell has announced that the RISC OS Banner Network has moved to **riscos.f2g.net/banners**. Andrew says the move is down to FS2.net ending their free hosting services.

The RISC OS Banner Network allows Web site owners to host RISC OS banners in return for their banner being displayed on other RISC OS sites. Currently, the service is free for both commercial and non-commercial use.

comp.sys.acorn.announce change of address

Stuart Marshall has issued a statement requesting that all submissions to the comp.sys.acorn.announce newsgroup now be sent to **csaa@spidersoft.co.uk** instead of the old Argonet address, with immediate effect.

Stuart warns that "articles sent either directly to the group, or to any of the previous addresses will not get seen."

myriscos hacked

The RISC OS equivalent to slashdot, **myriscos.co.uk**, was hacked on the 10th December. Hackers attacked the myriscos.co.uk server, provided and maintained by Co-Comp, leaving people logging onto the site faced with a cartoon of what appears to be a mad cow and a message from the hackers. The hacking has been largely derided by the online RISC OS community. No statement has yet been issued by Co-Comp. The other RISC OS portals have so far escaped the same fate. It is hoped that the site will be back online soon.

Contacting AU

news@acornuser.com

Rex Garrod's ROBOT CHALLENGE



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BT exact TECHNOLOGIES

YOUNG ENGINEERS TOMORROW'S · IDEAS · TODAY

BTexact Technologies and Young Engineers have joined forces with Rex Garrod, the legendary creator of Cassius, to devise a Design Formula and Rules for a schools 'Robot Challenge'.

The formula is designed to encourage re-cycling, with 'high tech' materials and certain mechanisms being banned. The robot must weigh no more than 12 kilos and must be powered by car windscreen wiper motors and 12 volt dry, NiCad or sealed lead acid batteries. Rex has written a short handbook for the challenge and this will be supplied to registered entries, entry to the challenge and to Young Engineers clubs is free.

A series of regional events will be held in spring 2002 and a national final in July. Dates and venues will be announced once teams have registered, along with guidelines on running the event. The national challenge final has a prize fund of £3,000. Marks will be awarded in four equal parts for:

- Design & Motivation
- Engineering Quality
- Control - robots will be required to negotiate an obstacle course
- Battle - a knockout competition against other competitors

The challenge is open to individuals or groups of up to four students, in two age categories, junior 9-13 years and senior 14-18 years. Schools may enter more than one team. The closing date for entry forms is 31 January 2002. Although designed with schools in mind, other groups such as scouts or guides may enter. A complete set of formula and rules is available. Please contact Young Engineers for further information or complete the following robot registration form in BLOCK CAPITALS and return to Young Engineers.

Name of School/College:

Address:

Postcode:

Tel: | Fax: | Email:

Name of Contact Teacher *(Club Leader)*:

Contact Teacher Signature: | Date:

Robot Team Name and Age Group *(Junior or Senior)*:

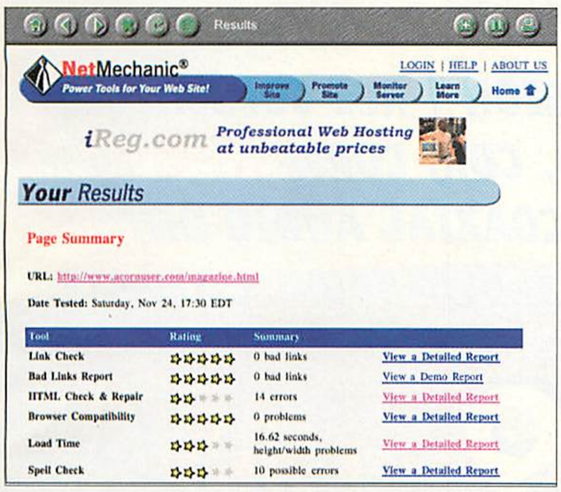
YOUNG ENGINEERS, Chiltlee Manor, Liphook, Hampshire GU30 7AZ
Tel: 01428 727265   Fax: 01428 727988   Email: admin@youngeng.org   Website: www.youngeng.org

Young Engineers is the national network of science, engineering, electronic & technology clubs in schools and colleges throughout the UK.

Send for the NetMechanic

N*etMechanic* offers a suite of online programs designed to be an expert system that can check your complete Web site, detect problems and even repair and correct your pages of HTML. It's a subscription-based service designed primarily for small businesses, and as an example the annual subscription for the *HTML Toolbox* service is $50 per year per site of 1 to 100 pages or frames.

As a taster and for the home user perhaps, *NetMechanic* also gives free online sample access to their Tools. Without taking out a subscription, you can submit up to five pages at a time to the *HTML Toolbox* just by typing in the URLs.



Quick! send for El Webbo?

If you choose the single page option, the reports are returned online in a few seconds as you watch, while the report for multiple pages will be sent to your requested e-mail address.

The *Link Check* and *Bad Links Report* verifies links to local pages and images and to off-site pages and gives status reports. The *HTML Check and Repair* finds and lists bad HTML and syntax errors, and the paid subscription will even generate a repaired page for you to upload.

The *Browser Compatibility* report is compiled showing tags or attributes of your page that are incompatible with different versions of the major browsers. The *Spell Check* suggests possible spelling errors, and in the full version you can customise the dictionary to allow special words.

The *Load Time* check totals the time taken to load in the whole page, calculated for various modem speeds. Also listed here are all the images and their sizes with access to the other excellent free-access tool, *GIFBot*. This online utility optimises each image, whether GIF or JPEG and offers for free download a selection of lower bandwidth versions to compare with your original. This comparison feature uses what might be the one legitimate use of the mouse "roll-over" to switch between old and new images on-screen.

The final tool offered to subscribers but not demonstrated in the free sample area is called *Browser Photo*. Screenshots of your pages using 16 different browser and computer combinations are created to allow you to optimise your site across platforms.

The browsers included are various versions of *Internet Explorer* on PC and iMac, *Netscape* on PC and iMac, *Opera* on PC, *AOL* browser and the *WebTV* viewer.

The *NetMechanic* site also features a wealth of free advice and tips on Web design and optimisation in its *Learn More* section. You can subscribe to the *Webmaster Tips* newsletter, and browse numerous back-issues for useful information.

NetMechanic Power Tools
www.netmechanic.com

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0030:[2]^[3]^[4]^[5]^<li>[6]^The RISC OS View</li>
----:[2]^Error: missing </font> end tag before <li> tag. Click here to learn more
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0032:<li>[8]^Image processing 3</li>
0033:<li>[9]^Cacheing for Oregano</li>
0034:<li>[10]^KRPC300 Update</li>
0035:<li>[11]^TrueType Conversion</li>
0036:<li>[12]^TextEase Presenter</li>
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more
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----:[20]^Repair: inserting implicit <br> tag
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Issue--><b>November Issue on sale 4th October 2001</b><!--End of Next
Issue--></font></p></td>
0042:<td><img src="images/white.png" width="140" height="1"
alt="white"></td>
0043:</tr>
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You didn't want to do that, did you?

In brief

Hearing Voices

The BT press release goes something like this: "BT Ignite has developed a residential Voice-over-Internet protocol (VoIP) service for BT Retail customers called BT NetChat. Available via the BT.com Web site, the service enables subscribers to make and receive voice calls over the internet to other NetChat users.

They can also receive ordinary calls while still online. To make it work, an additional piece of software..." Uh-oh. Here it comes! "...called NetMeeting has to be loaded on to the user's PC." Well that keeps RISC OS users out then, even if the service only costs 99p a month (inc VAT). Unless you know different?

Remember ARMpit?

Thomas Olsson's ARMpit Bulletin Board in Denmark is now offline but his ARMWARE Web site tells the story. Thomas does freelance development and consulting for companies including Oregan Networks, and he has strong views on Web design and layout as put forward in his DOGME 00 Vow of Web Chastity.

He cites Jacob Neilsen's book Designing Web Usability and the Neilsen useit.com site as sources of good design advice. You can buy this volume from Amazon.com for $34.98 including international shipping or from Amazon.co.uk for £37.74. Can you guess which vendor I chose for my copy?

DOGME 00
www.armware.dk/dogme00/

Contacting me

David Dade:
comms@acornuser.com

Olympian pictures

Steve Turnbull looks at the Olympus C-1

Olympus has recently relaunched its range of digital cameras with USB interfaces rather than the earlier serial connections. This threw Acorn companies such as Photodesk into a bit of a problem since RISC OS machines either don't have USB or don't have the necessary support.

However these cameras also have SmartMedia cards for storage — unfortunately this too was a bit of a problem. The reading and writing of CompactFlash storage cards had already been solved by Surftec with its DigiFlash software and hardware, however SmartMedia was proving to be harder to deal with.

Luckily for us the SmartMedia problem has now been solved, at least for reading, and the USB problem is soon to be resolved as well. Which is all to the good because it means that Photodesk — one of the biggest specialist suppliers of Olympus cameras in or out of the RISC OS world — can still sell these excellent cameras to you and me.

We thought that we would have a look at the base model in the range, the C-1. This has the minimum of facilities so you can be sure that anything higher in the range is better, but with a price to match.

We will start by looking at the camera itself. This is a very small unit in the traditional point'n'shoot style. It has a slide cover over the lens which must be opened for the camera to be able to take shots. The camera comes with an 8Mb SmartMedia card which can hold between 30 and 40 images — the precise number is variable as the images are stored as JPEGs and the level of compression on each image varies.

When you get it there is a whole pile of documentation, the SmartMedia card is in its own little pocket and the batteries are supplied but not inserted.

As with all cameras of this sort the whole body seems to be full of little doors. There is the SmartMedia door front-right which opens to reveal the insertion slot. There is also a little icon showing which round the card fits. On the underneath below this slot is the battery space which takes the 3v Lithium supplied battery pack.

On the left are the external connection sockets under a soft rubbery door which is designed to prevent dirt getting into the sockets. here we have a USB socket, video out socket and an external power socket.

Just for good measure, as Olympus are a traditional camera manufacturer that turned to digital, there (what I think) is a tripod mount on the underneath.

The controls on the back are next to the LCD screen, these are the minimum you can sensibly use, there is an OK/Menu button on the top right of the group; the monitor button and the arrow keys.

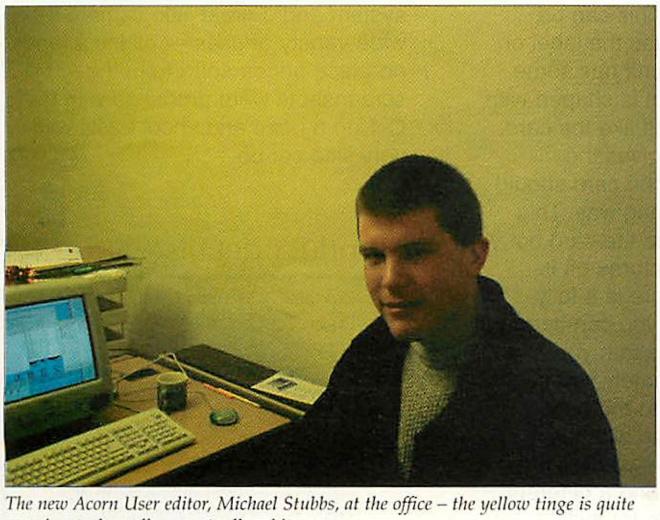
The monitor button switches on the LCD screen for accessing the currently stored images and the menu system when the camera "lens barrier" is closed, the camera is switched off. The menu button accesses the menu once the monitor is switched on and the arrow keys allow you to navigate the menus and also switch the currently displayed image.

As a first step you can set the date and time (which can optionally be included on the image). To take a picture you simply slide open the lens barrier point and shoot. The image temporarily appears on the LCD and is then stored.

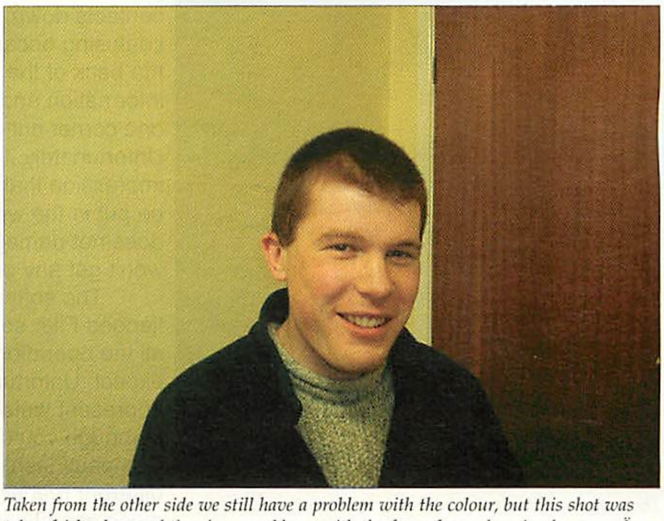
The other way of taking pictures is to switch on the LCD while the lens barrier is open, this gives a continually updated view of what is being seen by the camera. This is not really recommended unless you have a bottomless pit of money for new batteries.

Once you have your pictures stored you can review them on the LCD and delete the ones that you don't want. The C-1 has a digital zoom (up to 2X), it can take three qualities of image, several different flash settings, multiple image taking (low quality images recommended for fastest recording); time delay; then automatic exposure time can be altered for special shoots; there's a macro mode and adjustments for the type of light being shot in. Quite a range of facilities for such a relatively low cost unit.

The multiple image option has just



The new Acorn User editor, Michael Stubbs, at the office – the yellow tinge is quite prominent, the walls are actually white.



Taken from the other side we still have a problem with the colour, but this shot was taken fairly close and there's no problems with the focus for such a simple camera!

found its way into cameras at the bottom of the range and the images are stored as a series of JPEGs in the same way as the others.

It is probably worth mentioning that as you get a standard package from Olympus, but with the hardware and software additions from Surftec and Photodesk if you want them; you also get the full range of PC software as well. this is all very well but you will need at least Windows 98 version 2 (and not the Plus version) otherwise it won't work and unless you now what you are doing it can mess up your PC. Just thought I would mention it.

Once you have taken your pictures you need to get them into your computer and until USB is available there's only one way to do it and that's through the SmartMedia reader. Photodesk can supply this direct with its single floppy with the application on it.

Once USB does become available you will be able to go back to the facility whereby you can actually control the camera from the computer using the PhotoLink software upgraded to USB. This is certainly something to look forward to as the range of facilities is much greater if you can do this.

There are simple instructions for loading the software depending on whether you want it to run every time you start up or whether you want it "on demand". I opted for the latter although some people might want it there all the time — after all it's not just cameras that use SmartMedia.



No red-eye here, unsurprisingly, we have shown this image double the size to show the resolution is still good

The software is easy to install, the hardware read is a little more tricky. Basically it plugs into both the printer port and the keyboard socket of your computer and provides a keyboard-through socket for you to plug the keyboard into — this all works without trouble although if you have a lot of different things plugged into the printer port you could start running into problems.

Running the software simply gives you an icon on the iconbar on the far left if you have RISC OS 3.5 or later. One caveat at this point is that you need to watch out for the way you plug-in your SmartMedia card. It goes in contacts down. This can be confusing because the label on the back of the unit has some information and it is shaped with one corner cut-off like the card. Unfortunately it gives the impression that the card should be put in the wrong way. This does not damage the card but you won't get any pictures off it.

The software is a fully fledged Filer so you can carry out all the operations that you might expect. Unfortunately you cannot at present write to the card (although you can with the CompactFlash — you will need a different reader and a different piece of software for this).



There was no difficulty with Michael but with these shots there was a distinct red-eye problem that the flash could not prevent

Now you could just stop there but there is, in fact, a piece of software from Photodesk called PhotoShow which provides a Photolink-type front-end to a directory of images which can be left on the card if you wish or it can be on your hard disc.

You simply drag the directory to PhotoShow which then pops up a window containing thumbnails of all the images. From here you can view the thumbnails and then drag them off to other locations including other applications.

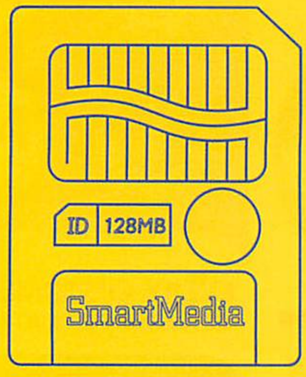
Additionally you can access a lot of detailed information, which is stored within the image, by clicking the Info button for the image you want. You can get date and time, resolution colours, and so on.

So there you have it a very nice system and a great little camera for a wide variety of uses — all the images on these pages apart from the screenshots were produced with the C-1 on a point and shoot basis with very little set-up. END

Product details

Product:	Olympus C-1 digital camera
Price:	£299 (inc VAT)
Supplier:	Photodesk Ltd, 1 The Courtyard, Southwell Business Park, Portland, Dorset DT5 NQ
Tel:	(+44/0) 1305 822753
Fax:	(+44/0) 1305 860483
E-mail:	chris@photodesk.ltd.uk
Web:	www.photodesk.ltd.uk

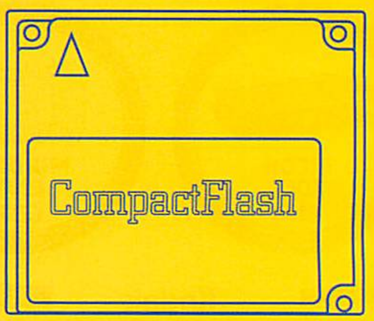
SmartMedia™ or CompactFlash™



DigiFlash, Surftec's range of CompactFlash and SmartMedia parallel port card readers for RISC OS systems.

Simply plug in, double click and away you go! DigiFlash shows an extra disc icon, allowing data to be copied to* and from the media just as if it was a floppy disc.

*SmartMedia is currently read only.



Add Photodesk's new Photoshow software for just £20!
(£23.50 inc VAT).



DigiFlash
The data card reader for RISC OS

Add Warm Silence Software's excellent Win95FS software for just £25!
(£29.37 inc VAT).

!Win95FS Offer!

Your choice of either a CompactFlash or SmartMedia reader for just...

£79
£92.82 inc VAT

SmartMedia	exc VAT	inc VAT
8MB	£8.40	£9.87
16MB	£10.80	£12.69
32MB	£16.20	£19.03
64MB	£27.60	£32.43
128MB	£63.60	£74.73

CompactFlash	exc VAT	inc VAT
8MB	£15.60	£18.33
16MB	£18.00	£21.15
32MB	£19.80	£23.26
64MB	£31.20	£36.66
128MB	£50.40	£59.22
256MB	£110.40	£129.72
MicroDrive 340MB	£160.85	£189.00
MicroDrive 1GB	£288.51	£339.00

How to place your order...

To order, simply send a cheque made payable to 'Surftec Ltd', (please remember to include VAT) along with your full name, address and most importantly your e-mail address as this will be used to provide you with future software updates. Postage to all UK destinations is FREE on orders over £70.

We regret we are unable to take credit or debit cards.

http://www.surftec.net/

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Oriental images

Neil Farnham-Smith explores the Fuji option

Fuji and Fujifilm are this month's focus with their vast array of digital camera and digital photo processing services. Digital cameras are the next big computer peripherals market, I see them as being a great way to take exciting photos, firstly you can see the results within seconds and there is no "hoping the photos will come out okay" when you come to collect them.

Canon and Fuji have recently been advertising their digital camera offerings on TV and as a result prices have been dropping and specifications growing ready for the mass consumer markets.

What to look for

Technically, when choosing a camera you should look at:

• Number of Mega Pixels the CCD can take.

As an example, a 1.2 Mega Pixel camera will fill the majority of the screen on most Acorn RISC OS systems running at 1024 x 768 at a 1:1 zoom.

My latest 3.3 Mega Pixel camera produces images larger than my Risc PC with ViewFinder card and 22" Iiyama monitor can display, and I'm running 1984 x 1488.

So your choice of camera should reflect how you wish to view the images taken. Will you just be viewing photos on screen, or will you want to print them out. If the latter than the greater the resolution the better.



• Zoom

I find a powerful optical zoom a valuable asset when outdoors, or equally if you don't normally run your camera at its highest possible resolution you can also set the resolution higher then crop the image later to zoom in onto the object.

• Size of preview screen

Many of the cameras provide a small preview screen, and it is easy to take a shaky blurred photo even though the image looks sharp on the camera's own screen. This is because the blurring is condensed and it is difficult to spot a bad photo.

Some cameras will allow you to zoom in and pan around the photo essentially allowing you to check the quality of your recently taken photo in detail before it's too late.

• Media used

CompactFlash, SmartMedia, MemoryStick, MultiMedia and Secure Digital, you need to ensure you have a way of getting the images from the camera onto your computer or printer.

Luckily, the majority of cameras use CompactFlash or SmartMedia for which there are RISC OS card readers.

What has Fuji to offer?

Fuji have three groups of cameras within their vast range, which I will try to summarise below the best aspects of each camera, using my four key camera purchasing points, those being CCD resolution, zoom, size of preview screen and media used.

Fuji's range uses SmartMedia on all the cameras except the top of the range S1 Pro which can take both SmartMedia, CompactFlash, including CompactFlash type 2 such as the IBM MicroDrive.

Fuji's range of general purpose cameras look like any standard snapper, small, compact, something you could feel comfortable throwing into a bag. They include a solid plastic panel which slides across the lens, except for the 2800 Zoom which incorporates a normal clip-on lens cap.

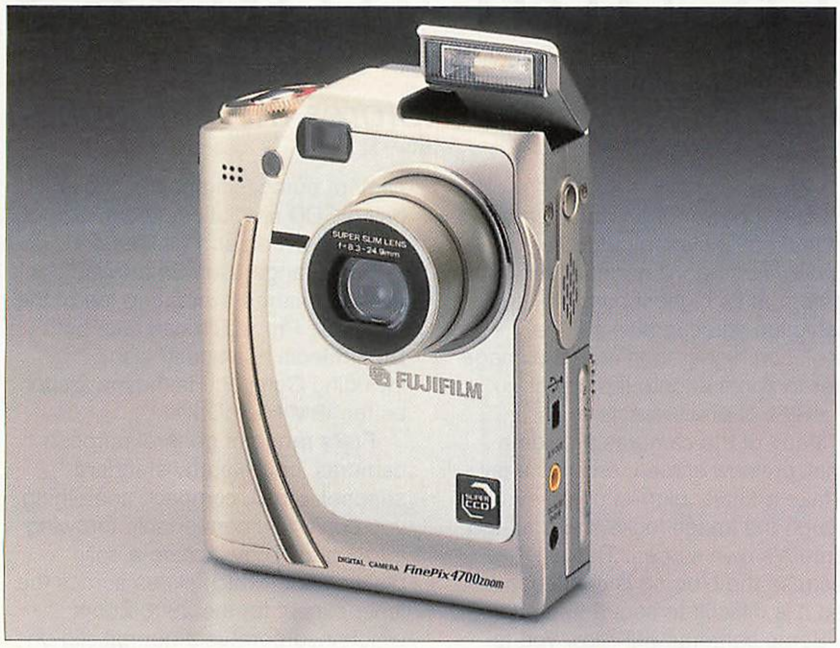
The general purpose range all have built in 1.6" colour D-TFD screens except for the 2600 Zoom and 2800 Zoom which come with larger 1.8" screens.

The FinePix A101, 1300 and 1400 Zoom all come as standard with 1.3 Mega Pixel CCD and are able to produce 1280 x 960 resolution images, however the A101 and 1300 only have a Fujinon optical lens, where as the 1400 Zoom (as suggested by its name) has a 3x zoom lens. The group all come with 8MB of media as standard.

The FinePix A201 and 2600 Zoom both incorporate a 2.0 Mega Pixel CCD, able to produce 1600 x 1200 images (which would fill the screen of a high end RISC PC with 2MB of VRAM and a good quality 17" monitor). The A201 is a fixed lens camera, and the 2600 like its sibling 1400 Zoom in the range has a 3x zoom lens. This group comes with larger 16MB media as standard.

The FinePix 2200, 2300 and 2400 Zoom differ from the last two only slightly, they come with a 2.1 Mega Pixel CCD, however the image resolutions are no different. They also come with smaller 8MB media. The 2200 and 2300 have optical lenses while the 2400 Zoom comes with a 3x zoom lens.

The FinePix 2800 Zoom must just fall short of the next category in Fuji's eyes, it is by no means a low spec camera, essentially identical in specification to the 2400 Zoom the 2800 has an amazing 6x zoom lens,



equivalent to 38mm—228mm on a standard film camera.

The MultiMedia Cameras range look like fashionable, compact 35mm cameras, they are all very thin and flat looking, but they come with impressively sized built-in preview screens.

This group all come with 4.3 Mega Pixel CCD lenses (using a Special 2.4 Super CCD Fuji lens) except for the 6800 Zoom which has an amazing 6.0 Mega Pixel images from Fuji's special 3.3 Super CCD. The 40i comes with 8MB media, however the remainder of this group all come with 16MB media.

The FinePix 40i has a 1.8" colour LCD screen and FinePix 50i has a smaller 1.5" low-temperature polysilicon TFT screen. Both come with Fuji's Super EBC Fujinon lens, equivalent to a standard 36mm film camera.

The FinePix 4700 Zoom, 4800 Zoom and 6800 Zoom are taller in design, come with a 3x zoom lens equivalent to 35mm — 108mm on a normal film camera and come with a huge 2" low-temperature polysilicon TFT screens, with this size of screen it becomes easier to show off your photos to a group of people at one time.

The final range is the Enthusiast/Professional Cameras. If you are serious about photography these cameras are your starting point.

The FinePix 4900 Zoom and 6900 Zoom both come with the larger 2" TFT screens as with 4700, 4800 and 6800 Zoom cameras. Both come with 6x Super EBC Fujinon zoom lenses, 16MB of SmartMedia and unlike all the earlier models which can only save JPEG images these higher models can save TIFF-RGB images suitable for professional print.

Remember JPEG images are compressed by loosing data which doesn't notice too much, they fool the human eye. TIFF is essentially uncompressed, therefore getting true image clarity, so if you plan to take lots of photos in TIFF mode you'll need huge amounts of media to store it on.

The FinePix S1 Pro, Fuji's flagship SLR digital camera, which can take Nikon F mount lenses, including AF and AI-P Nikkor lenses. Super high resolution 3.4 Super CCD, giving 6.1 Mega Pixel images, typically 3050 x 2016 pixels in size — not many (if any) monitors around that can even reach such high resolutions! Zoom is now dependent on the lens fitted, giving you the option to upgrade at a later date.

This camera can save out TIFF-RGB, TIFF(YC) and like all other Fuji's JPEG (Exif) images as well, this camera is aimed at the professional who needs images suitable for high quality print, brochures and so on.

The S1 has room for SmartMedia, CompactFlash Type 1 and 2, such as the IBM Microdrive, absolutely essential if taking lots of photos in TIFF mode.

Summing up

The Fuji range of cameras usually use Fuji's own rechargeable lithium-ion batteries, use AA batteries or are able to take both and come with either an AC adapter or separate battery charger.

It is only the lower end general purpose cameras which don't come with any form of AC adaptor or charger. With any digital camera it is worth purchasing extra of manufacturer's custom batteries, or a couple of sets of AA hi-power rechargeable batteries, 1500mAH or greater is best.

Most of the Fuji range is available from good RISC OS dealers, however a couple of the models are limited to a well-known chain of PC superstores.

Fuji's Web site **www.fujifilm.co.uk/FUJIDC/** contains a vast selection of example photos taken using their cameras, photos of the cameras themselves, specification sheets and more, within my allotted space I've had to skip much of the detail and highlight the major differences between the available models in the range.

Happy snapping!

END




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5.2 MEGAPIXELS
MINOLTA Dimage 7
£868
FREE 16MB CARD
1.3 MEGAPIXELS
FUJI Finepix 1300
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FUJI Finepix 30i
£288
4.3 MEGAPIXELS
FUJI Finepix 4700
£378
2.1 MEGAPIXELS
FUJI Finepix 2300
£208
2.1 MEGAPIXELS
FUJI Finepix 2600
£258
4.3 MEGAPIXELS
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*Secure on-line ordering at internetcamerasdirect.co.uk we use a 128 bit model to encrypt your credit card details within the browser on your PC. The details are not decrypted until downloaded onto our server. This is the most secure model. We use an encryption standard called Diffie-Hellman, which is a public key algorithm for key exchange, and is widely used on the internet. InternetCamerasDirect.co.uk, 4 Peel Street, Marsden, Huddersfield HD7 6BW

Tales from the Midl

Following last year's very successful show at The National Motorcycle Museum right next door to the NEC near Birmingham the ARM Club went full steam ahead on the latest show which took place on 1st December 2001

All the usual services were provided including coaches, and food on tap. As usual there was a certain amount of confusion as the venue also runs a general computer event as well — so what looks like huge queues for the RISC OS show in fact isn't.

The weather was particularly bad this time and many of the exhibitors were completely worn out before they even started — and traffic only added to the problems with exhibitors arriving close to the start time.

Two years ago the Midlands show was a dead loss from the exhibitors viewpoint, poorly attended and not much fun. Last year however the show was vibrant and full of life.

This year was a return to the old form for some but other exhibitors reported a good show — it is difficult to tell quite why that should be but that's the way it was.

It is certainly true that the numbers were down and as such perhaps it was mainly the general dealers rather than the specialists that did well out of it.

Apart from the weather reducing the number of people attending — no one wants to drive long distances in continuous rain — there was also the fact that there apparently would be no special launch at this show, which always tends to be the poor relation to the main RISC OS show in mid to late October.

But in fact this was not the case.

There was one major announcement which was completely unadvertised and should have had people attending in droves had it been known — Riscstation is going ahead with its portable. It is not the same machine as originally announced but it is certainly good, any portable is better than nothing in the current state of affairs. So let's see what you get for your money:

The machine is roughly 242x190x30mm, weighs 1.3Kg and has a 8.4" TFT 800x600 touchscreen screen (this looks very nice); for storage it has 64MB memory, 10GB hard drive and a glidepoint touchpad for mouse control, I've not used one myself but many people like them. On the plug-in side it has PCMCIA, USB and 10baseT Ethernet all coming as standard which is excellent news.

Now the not-so-good news. This is not what some might call a complete machine, obviously the unit you have has everything you need for mobile computing except that there is no serial or parallel ports, big screen output and so on. For these you have to get the docking station which is extra. Prices start from £999 ex VAT, and for a £100 deposit you can secure one of the first on the release date of late February 2002.

Riscstation are being cautious, they are deliberately not advertising this machine until they actually have it ready but there is no reason to be concerned in this case. The innards have been ready for the last year, the machine has only been awaiting a case.

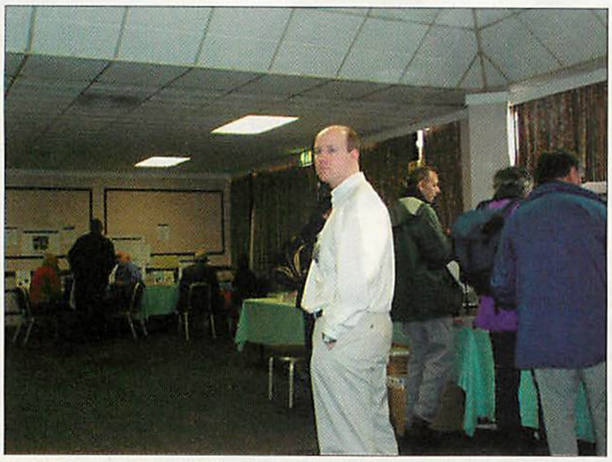
This type of machine is what is called, in the PC world, a sub-notebook; being smaller than your typical laptop and with lower screen resolution. My informants say that the front-end for this machine is going to be tweaked to make it easier to use if you're not a RISC OS devotee and Riscstation are going for markets outside the traditional one with this little baby.

More power to them.

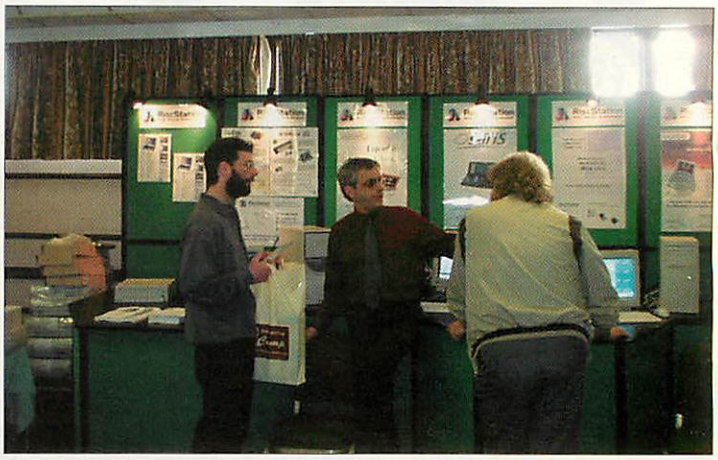
Other attendees at the show included Acorn User (of course); Neil Spellings of the AAUG; Akalat Publishing with their magazine Acorn Publisher; and Archive magazine.

Castle Technology were not there in force — in fact it was Richard Brown of Genesys wearing a Castle sweatshirt with the Castle display stands. Having said that Richard was one of the people who reported having an excellent show.

Cerilica were there with Vantage and their other DTP products; while surprise attendee was Clares Micro Supplies, Dave and Chris were both there with a lot of their RISC OS software including Topographer (the Ordnance Survey to 3D mapping software) and the latest incarnation



Neil Spellings of the AAUG, before the Show gets going



Roy Heslop, world class speaker, of CTA and RiscStation holds his title against all comers

ands Show

of the spreadsheet Schema with the SchemEx conversion software, see our review in this issue.

CJE Micros were there as usual seemingly having everything including the kitchen sink — well, I'm sure it was there somewhere even if it was backed up on disc.

Fortran Friends were in attendance with more of their interesting polygons as was Icon Technology with Techwriter.

New company ITC were also there. With the electronic design side of Reflex Electronics dying it took the Acorn repair side with it. However Dave Lumley and co have resurrected this side of the business as ITC and are selling parts.

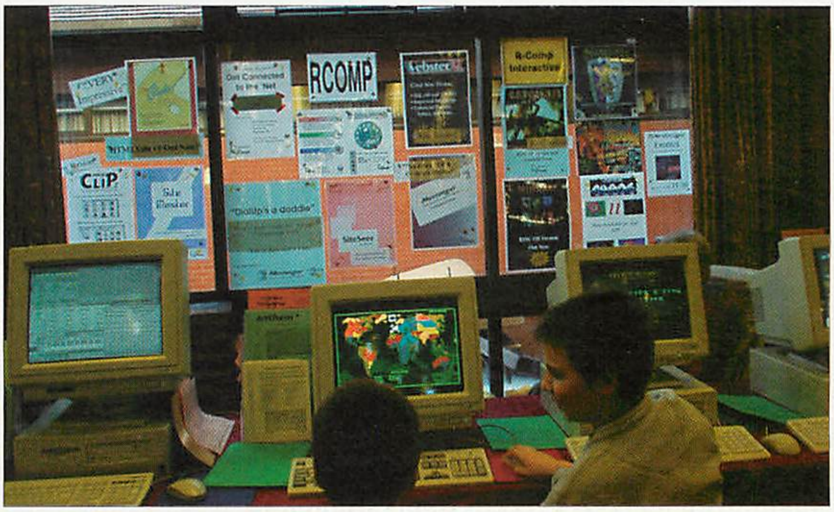
Another surprise entry was KudlianSoft (long term RISC OS educational supplier who do more with Macs nowadays) were attending selling their CD collection.

R-Comp and R-Comp Interactive were running games in a mini-arcade and selling their Internet software; and RISCOS Ltd were offerling the Select Scheme.

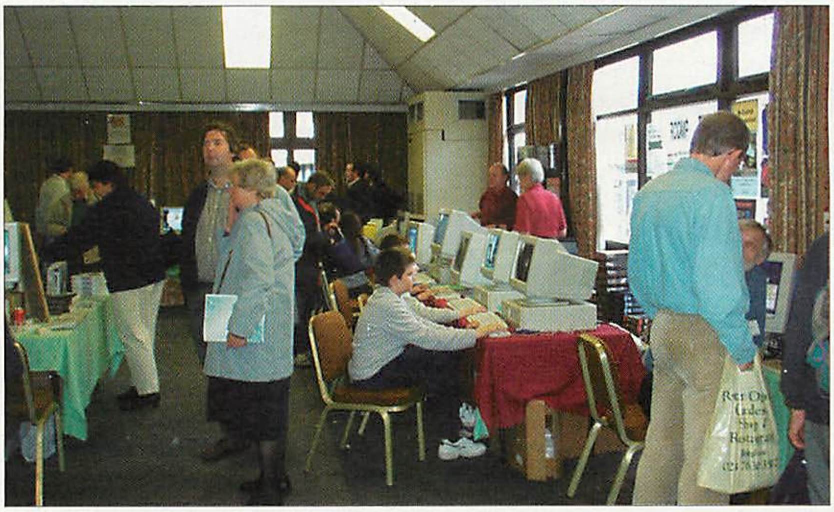
Finally, there was Surftec with the delightful Bex (and Neil) who were located behind the Acorn User stand, showing off their SmartMedia card reader and some very expensive digital cameras.

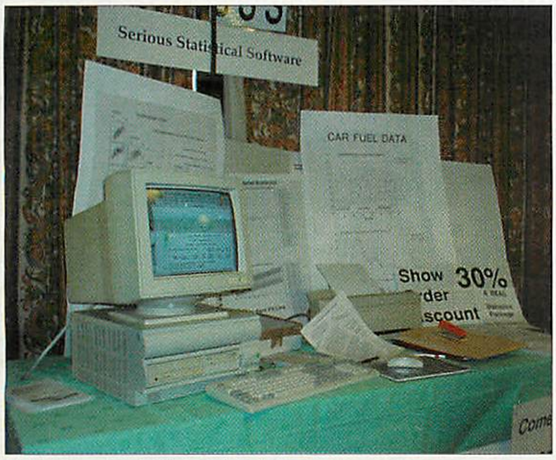
So a bit of a mixed day all round however an important one with the announcement of the RiscStation portable.

Something to look forward to.

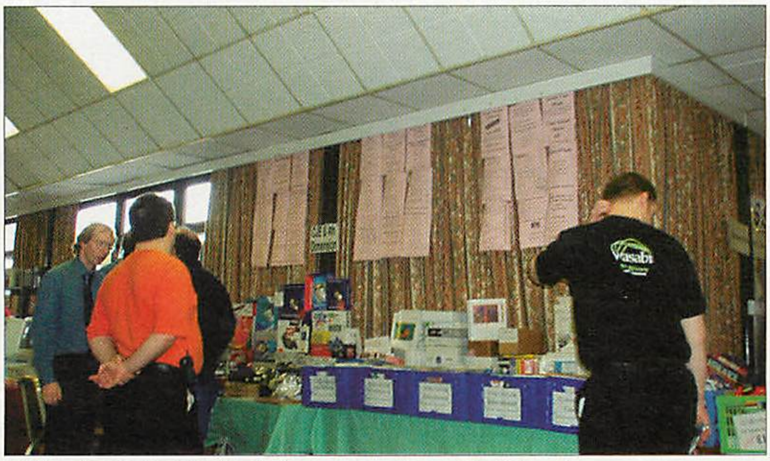


Above and below, theR-Comp stand was really cooking all day long





Robin Edwards of SSS, calculates his travelling expenses



Neil Farnham-Smith of Surftec checks out the opposition at the CJE stand

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Translation scheme

Mike Tomkinson takes a long look at this important Schema utility

One of the areas where RISC OS users have always been well catered for in terms of the variety of software available is spreadsheets. We have had *Pipedream*, *Eureka*, *Resultz*, several public domain ones, the one in *Advance* and its big brother *Schema2*.

All have there own strong and weak points, followers and detractors and a mention of any favourite of yours is sure to open up a debate as heated as that which usually follows advocacy of *Zap* over *StrongEd*. However, on the PC there is really only one spreadsheet and that is *MS Excel*. Sorry Lotus lovers but resistance is futile, as they say.

There are many reasons why users of RISC OS might want or need to transfer between spreadsheets on the Acorn to a spreadsheet on the PC, or *Excel* as it is known. I am going to look in more detail at one such use in a future article but suffice it to say that because of the dominance of *Excel* it has become not only a de facto standard but also a de jure standard. If you do not believe this look at the Web site for the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) — **www.ecdl.com** — at version 3.0 of the spreadsheet module syllabus.

This qualification and the success of the Individual Learning Accounts programme (before it was scrapped) have led many people into computing to gain a basic and widely recognised certificate showing basic competence with the most popular computer applications. Owing to the dominance of the *MS Office* suite of programs the courses offered by various institutions and training establishments have become virtual *MS Office* courses.

Do not get me wrong here *Excel* is a very competent spreadsheet with many excellent features — I use it all the time at work and consider myself an expert in its use. Training establishments, however, do not teach generic spreadsheet skills but how to pass a test based solely on your ability to drive *MS Excel*.

Thus the ECDL syllabus does not say "thou shalt use Excel", but Module AM4 — section AM4.4 Analysis asks you to create a Pivot Table. There is only one spreadsheet (that I know) that allows you to do this and calls it a Pivot Table. No prizes for guessing which one. To be fair this is an Advanced Spreadsheet Module and the standard module is much more generic in terms of what skills are required.

Let us suppose that you did wish to gain a basic IT qualification. There is nothing wrong with this although the analogy with a driving licence is a good one — you may pass your test but it does not make you a good driver. You would be very lucky to find anywhere that teaches generic spreadsheet skills on a RISC OS platform apart from the few schools who have had the courage and foresight to resist the PC. Of course, most training places make no pretence of teaching you anything — generic or otherwise. You are on a training course and there is a large difference between training and education.

However, if you do have a RISC OS machine at home you may wish to apply the training to a RISC OS spreadsheet or simply to practice the exercises for your test without the expense of buying a PC and a copy of the Office suite. You may also wish to take your work backwards and forwards between the two platforms.

Many, if not all, of the RISC OS spreadsheets recognised this when they were first written. If you look they will have converters for Lotus 1-2-3 or earlier versions of Excel but things have moved on and many of these early converters, even where they did work, no longer do so.

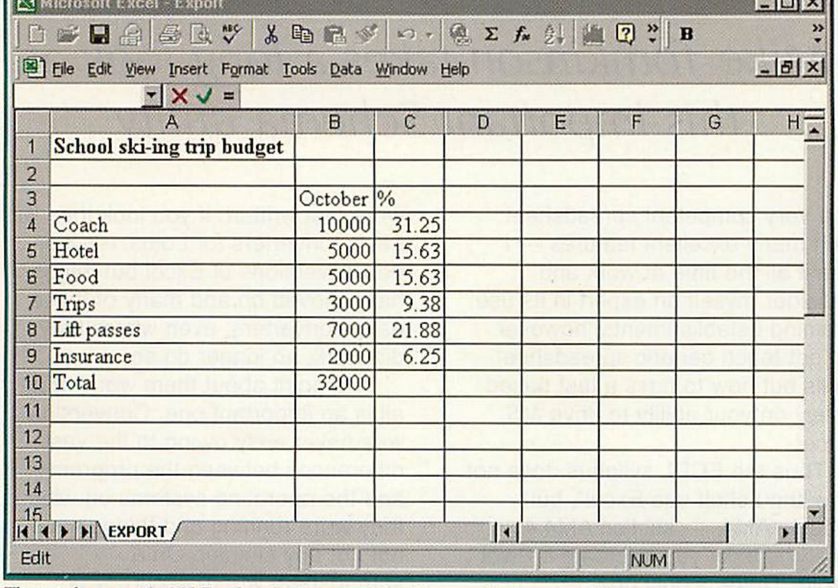
The point about them working at all is an important one. Conversion was never easy owing to the vast differences between the programs and the operating systems on which they were running and things have not got any simpler. On a spreadsheet where accuracy is everything a misinterpreted formula is likely to be more than a minor irritation.

This brings us to *SchemEx* from Clares Micro Computer Supplies Ltd. As its name might imply to you it offers a conversion route between Clares *Schema 2* RISC OS spreadsheet and *MS Excel* up to and including the latest XP version. It is up-to-date, still being developed and supported, as is *Schema 2* albeit with only minor revisions and therefore perfect for the task of moving spreadsheets between two platforms.

Schema 2 was always one of the strongest spreadsheets on RISC OS — if you have old back copies dig out my comparative review from *Acorn User* Issue 178 in February 1997.

The conversion route is not really through a converter as such but via the HTML language. This hypertext language is most usually associated with Web pages but in this case makes an excellent file format for conversion between the two platforms as as they can both understand HTML. In practice the installation of *SchemEx* is simple and straightforward and in essence you end up with another option on the File->Export menu. This enables you to export as a HTML file or page.

Once this is done you save your work onto a DOS formatted 1.44Mb floppy or across you network and Robert is your Father's brother as they say. *Excel* can read the HTML



The test document in MS Excel, a simple example but it covers the important things

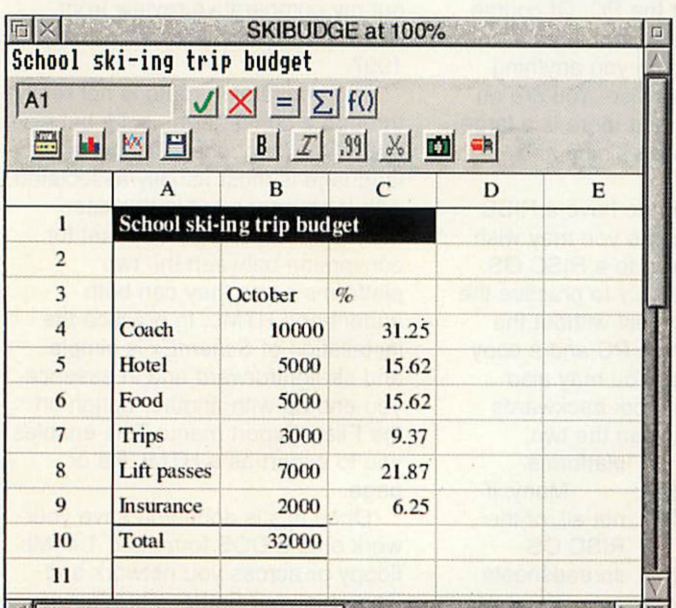
files and generally does a very good job of interpreting the results. Not only that but it works the other way was well. That is you can save your work in *Excel* (as a Web page) and *Schema 2* converts it back to your favourite platform.

Naturally, and as you might expect, if you use a function in one spreadsheet that is not found in the other you will get an error message but on the assumption you knew what the function was doing in the first place you can either find its equivalent or write your own.

It would be unreasonable to expect macros (small programs automating an aspect of a spreadsheet for ease of use) to be converted as *Schema* uses *BBC Basic* and *Excel* uses *Visual Basic* and they have little other in common other than the word "Basic" in both titles. The same goes for graphics for similar reasons.

So does it actually work in practice? Well, of course it does, certainly on fairly complex single page spreadsheets and this includes interpreting the colours and fonts correctly between platforms.

A minor annoyance is that grid lines are not shown on the sheet upon import into *Excel* but they can soon be put back with the Format->Cells->Border menu and Tab.



The same document transferred into Schema 2 via SchemEx

Multiple pages spreadsheets or Workbooks will present you with a challenge but some judicious cutting and pasting can achieve a result but if you get this far you will be pushing the envelope on *SchemEx* and it is not really designed for this type of sheet.

Going back to my opening comments about such qualifications as the ECDL and similar qualifications like the RSA's popular CLAIT (Computer Literacy and Information Technology) they will ever only require you to produce relatively simple spreadsheets. Frankly, if you have done a GCSE IT course you should have done more complex spreadsheets.

To prove this I created a spreadsheet similar to those required in the sample ECDL tests and converted it to *Excel* using *SchemEx*. Now at this point something very rare happened. *SchemEx* could not convert this to HTML.

If you look at my simple Ski-trip budget sheet I used relative cell references in column B to refer to the total in column A. Although it took me a while to back track and find this out a quick e-mail to David Jackson the Technical Support Manager at Clares produced a new !RunImage to cure the problem as you can see from the *Excel* spreadsheet showing the exported file in *Excel*.

Frankly I find this reassuring. If the product were not supported to this level I would be worried as spreadsheet and their uses can be highly individualistic. The same level of support exists for *Schema 2* where Clares will always listen to customers to see if it is possible to add features or more likely macros to do certain tasks.

In summary *SchemEx* does what it is sold to do and makes an excellent addition to a good spreadsheet should you have a need to convert a sheet to *Excel* and vice versa. It only costs £35 including VAT and p&p or only £15 if you buy it with *Schema 2* at £80.

END

Product details

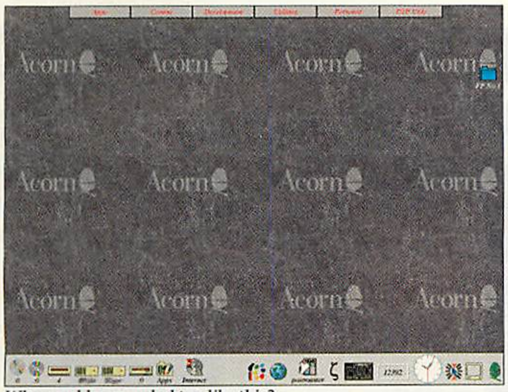
Product:	Schemex
Price:	£35 inc VAT and p&p, (£15 if bought with Schema2 for £80)
Supplier:	Clares Micro Supplies Ltd, 75a Webbs Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 9DS
Tel:	01606 833999
E-mail:	sales@claresmicro.com
Web:	www.claresmicro.com
Contact:	ECDL Foundation Ltd, 107 The Windmill, Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin 2, Eire
Tel:	00353 1 679 2847
E-mail:	info@ecdl.com
Web:	www.ecdl.com

Through the desktop

Welcome to another episode in this ongoing look at the desktops of notable individuals from the RISC OS market. In this series we take a look at the types of software these people use and how they use it. So without further delay let us be introduced to this month's celebrity desktop.

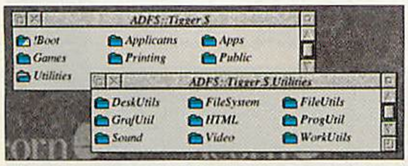
What we have this time is a fairly tidy and restrained desktop, it uses one of the standard tiled backgrounds featuring the Acorn logo — and the Acorn switcher icon in the corner shows someone who has yet to upgrade to RISC OS 4. On the other hand we have a 1024 x 768 resolution which, with a little investigation, is at 32K colours this means we are looking at a Risc PC with 2MB VRAM.

This is a barely upgraded machine it does have a StrongARM but no built-in CD, you can see from workstation picture that the ancient


Who would own a desktop like this?

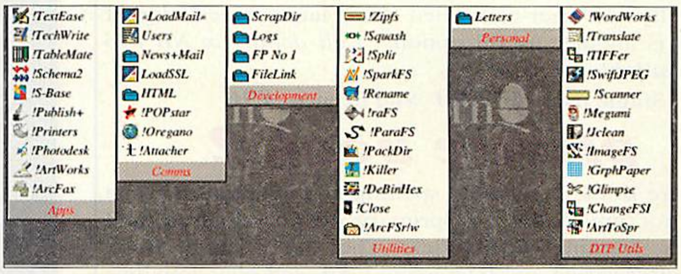
CD-ROM drive is an external (SCSI) and, in fact, is plugged into a major piece of sound system complete with four speakers and a sub-woofer. A strange contradiction.

The iconbar looks a bit full with two drive 0 CDs — one is the standard software for RISC OS 3.7 while the other is CDROMFS from Warm Silence Software, handy for reading PC CDs. Then there is a ZipFS drive, two hard discs (incredibly, only 600Mb of space on them combined).



Tidy and organised hard discs?

For Internet access there is the ANT Suite, plus Oregano plus Messenger Pro. This person uses Impression Publisher Plus for writing (though there is a copy of Ovation Pro on the hard disc) as does one of the other major users of the computer in this house (which contains three RISC OS machines and two PCs).



Even more organisation – lots of applications and lots of DTP utilities

Music is provided by the external CD-ROM drive and accessed using an old version of SmartCD — but the latest version of Chris Morison's Organizer is here along with an application you almost never see: Flasher. This little gem ensures that the writing carat flashes regardless of where it is. Originally written by Minerva Software it came free with other software by that company. It is over ten years old now.

Sitting between SmartCD and Organizer is Acorn's old MemNow application. So we have a confusing combination of old and new software — perhaps someone who goes on using the oldest software as long as it does what is needed, but will buy the latest if that is needed.

At the top of the screen is MenuBar by Graham Crow, another old program and this is version 1. Taking a look at all the entries we find a huge range of different applications which give the impression of someone who does a lot of DTP/Graphics work and perhaps software development as well.

The hard disc too is very well organised, a place for everything and everything in its place. There is a games directory on the main hard disc but it contains only one game: Sangband. There is no wastage here.

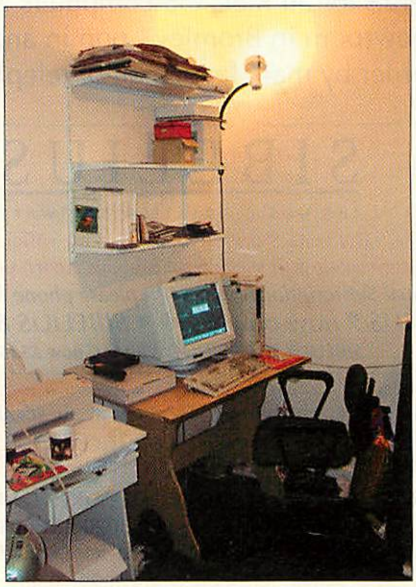
One program in the background which you can't see and almost never comes into play, because this computer is seldom switched off, is SaveDesk. This is a PD module written by Nick Jarman back in 1994 that has been stripped of all its application wrapper and is now loaded as the module alone.

What it does is save all the icons on the backdrop and also which directories are open and their position on screen. When the machine is shutdown and re-started it re-opens the directories and places the icons on the backdrop. Very handy.

The picture of the workspace shows a very compact area — no room for piles of paper, this is clearly a paper-free zone. There is an old Scanlight mono scanner and a second computer which is a vanilla A7000. The shelves above the computer contain two sets of Programmer's Reference Manuals, music CDs, floppy discs and Zip discs in fairly untidy piles.

So there you have it, the old and the new in a strange combination, a very utilitarian machine, one that is used for work and not play, a computer professional of some sort. So who is that owns a desktop like this?

Find out next month. **END**


A very utilitarian workspace – all work and no play

Web ways

An increasing number of RISC OS users find themselves designing Web sites, whether for a club they support or perhaps just a family site for a bit of fun. Whatever your reason for building a Web site, it's most likely that you're going to need to create some graphics for it.

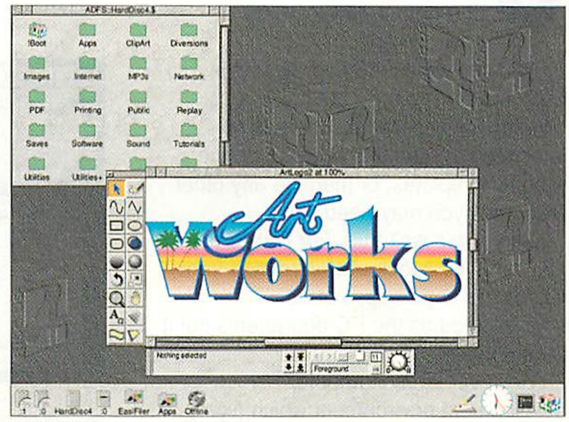
This month we take a brief look at the top programs available to create graphics for the Web. All the software here is vector-based, giving you the advantage of being able to resize and edit any part of your graphics at any time. This is ideal for Web work where tweaks have to be made all the time.

Vantage

Vantage has now passed the hype-and-review stage and has emerged as an extremely competent piece of software. Most talk has centred on how good *Vantage* is for print work, with it's TRUISM ink simulation technology displaying images on screen as they will appear in print.

However *Vantage* is a winner for Web graphics, too. This is chiefly down to its anti-aliasing engine and ability to save out in PNG and Sprite formats (utilities such as Translator allow you to convert sprites to almost any other bitmap format). *Vantage* converts all text to lines when you export as a bitmap and then renders the image using over 200,000 levels of anti-aliasing (standard tends to be just 16). This results in a fantastically crisp image, neatly avoiding the "limitations" of the RISC OS font manager.

Vantage is not light on the wallet, but it will give you the very best output for the Web. Its anti-aliasing engine creates images that are of such a high quality that it lends itself to professional use. The likes of Illustrator (the Adobe software) cannot beat it. If you're doing some serious work and can afford it, *Vantage* should be the software you choose.



ArtWorks keeps on getting better

ArtWorks

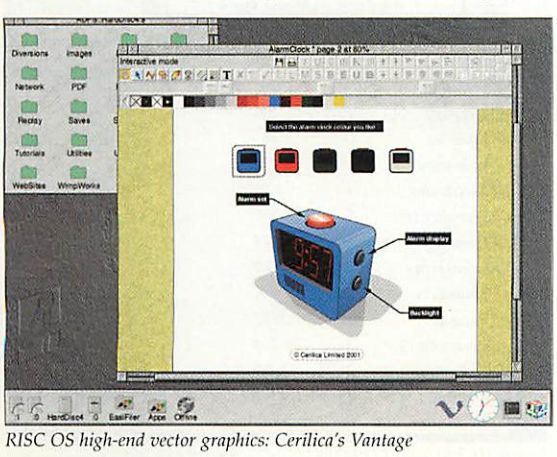
The original and most widely-used high-end vector graphics package for RISC OS, *ArtWorks* is having a renaissance. The reason is MW Software, a company that has developed countless modules for the package that add new functions and tools. For any sort of serious work, you'll need MW Software's full range of modules. Perhaps the most important here is *BMExport*, which allows you to save out your designs in Sprite or GIF format — essential for Web graphics.

If you can't quite stretch to *Vantage*, *ArtWorks* presents a high-value solution. Add MW Software's modules and you've got a package that can still give *Vantage* a run for its money. Anti-aliasing is at 16 levels, but MW Software are busy coding to increase this. If you already have *ArtWorks*, the addition of the extra modules will provide you with an excellent solution and is highly recommended. MW Software's innovative developments are keeping *ArtWorks* snapping at *Vantage*'s heels and it's definitely worth serious consideration.

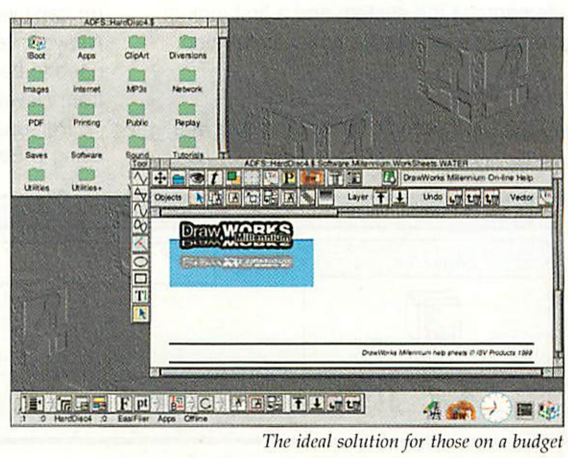
DrawWorks 3M

Creating a bit of an overlap is *DrawWorks 3rd Millennium*. *DW3M* hooks into *Draw* and adds lots of new tools, effects and import/export options. It has improved anti-aliasing over *Draw* and comes bundled with lots of useful applications and fonts. An excellent buy for occasional Web use, I personally recommend *DW3M* to be used in conjunction with *Vantage* or *ArtWorks* because it has special effects tools that they don't but they have the edge on the final finish. Amazingly good value for those on a budget.

This very brief run through the packages obviously does not do them justice. Next month we will look in more detail about the pros and cons of each piece of software, specifically for Web graphics.



RISC OS high-end vector graphics: Cerilica's Vantage



The ideal solution for those on a budget

Database details

Steve Turnbull begins a new series on writing applications in S-Base

One thing that is lamented about the current state of the RISC OS programming scene is the lack of a proper development environment.

You can write BASIC programs in *Edit*, *Zap* or *StrongEd* but if you are creating full applications there is no integrated system that will also do the window templates, or manage any other resources you may need.

In fact this isn't true. For BASIC itself you can take a look at *WIMPBasic* from Clares this is perhaps not as sophisticated as the PC equivalents but it is very useful.

However there is another development environment which exists complete and has done for many years — and is still being updated — and that is S-Base.

Sold by Bluewater Systems in New Zealand it is a highly competent database language in three versions which is also being implemented in a Linux version which works identically to the RISC OS version. Which means the program you write for one system automatically works on the other.

There is a big break in the versions, going from the very latest 2.4i to the next Linux-compatible one where some substantial changes are being made to the structure. Overall the system works in the same way and we will be working with the current, stable version.

In this series of articles we will be looking at programming a complete application in S-Base, we will look at how to analyse your database requirements; how to use the various resources of the system; how it all fits together and how to implement quite complex databases using it.

In this first article we shall be looking at the application variants, the basic elements of the system and a first look at the application we are going to develop.

Variants

There are three versions of the software: *Personal*, *Developer* and *Network*. The

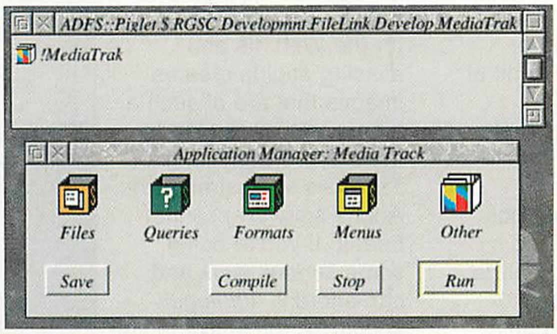


Figure II: Once you have created your application you can see the simple control interface

Personal version contains the development environment but does not have the capability to create stand-alone versions of any application that you might develop.

Developer has the added capability of creating stand-alone versions which you can distribute freely. You can even sell it without any royalty payment to Bluewater, and to my mind this is an excellent system to use to develop applications.

Network is a huge jump forward from *Developer* allowing you to create a system which has the core database storage on one machine but allows an S-Base front-end to access it over a network. Clearly a system you would need if developing a major multi-user application. Once again there is no payment to Bluewater for applications created with the *Network* version.

There is little functional difference between *Personal* and *Developer* but there are quite a few commands within the system that behave differently (or can't work at all) in the *Network* version so care does need to be taken when going from *Developer* to *Network*.

Personally I have been using S-Base *Developer* for many years, in fact several key applications used by Tau Press, including the subscription management database is an S-Base application. I have also written commercial programs, one used in the Special Needs area, with it. It is the language of choice for me and I hope I can show you why that is and how you can use it too for databases applications you would like to create.

The application

Once you have S-Base installed on your hard disc the next thing to do is to launch it, there is a start-up window that gives version numbers and so forth and finally you have the S-Base icon sitting on the iconbar with the word "idle" beneath it.

Clicking Select on the iconbar icon generates the new application window where you can enter the filename of the application and also its name which can contain spaces (Figure I).

As a quick aside let us take a look at the application we will be creating. What we shall look at is a program that can keep track of CDs, DVDs, videos, cassette tapes and so on — in fact we are not going to limit what it is used for, we will just create a framework. We will call it *MediaTrack* — with a filename of *!MediaTrak*, RISC OS 4 may be able to handle filenames with more than 10

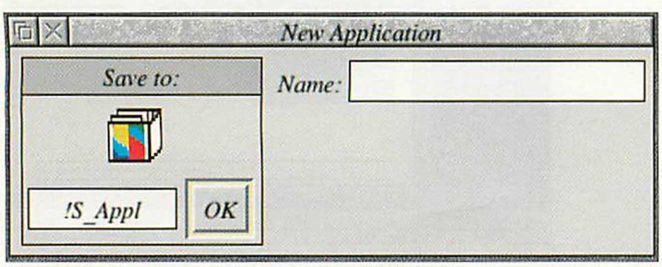


Figure I: Creating a new database application with S-Base

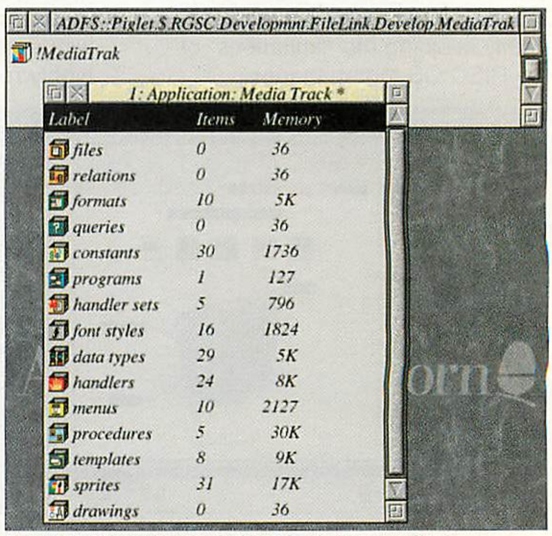


Figure III: We want to use the lower level resources editors

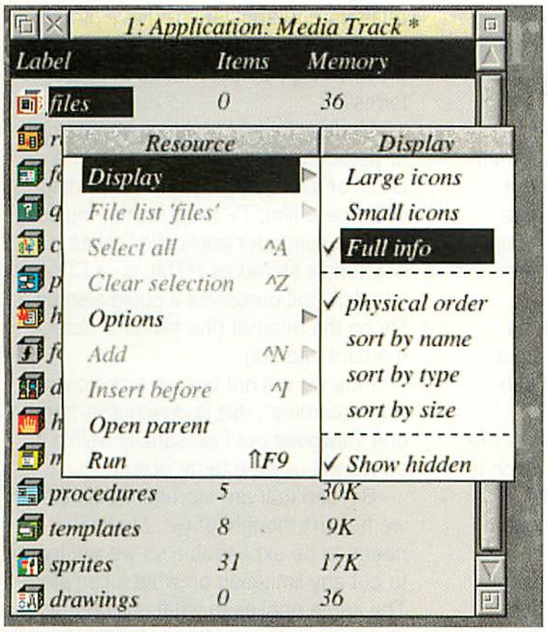


Figure IV: We will use this display

characters but there are complexities when developing a program in that environment and not being careful.

So we name the application *MediaTrack* and drag the icon to the location on the harddisc that we want to keep it. This is the development version, it is not standalone.

What pops up then is the application manager window which contains a number of icons and some buttons (Figure II). I never use this window as it only displays a limited number of the full resources of an S-Base application instead I always do an Adjust click on the "Other" icon which pops up the resource list for this application (Figure III).

We will go through each of these in a little more detail in a moment but before that we will look at some higher level facilities.

Clicking Menu in this window give you a practical menu, the only thing I want to look at now is the Display sub-menu this lets you control how the items in each of the various windows is displayed. My personal preference is for *Full info* in *Physical order* (Figure IV).

I have *Show hidden* also set as a matter of course but this option won't have much relevance in this series of articles. S-Base has some standard files it uses to create its standard database system called SAM. This can be very useful for putting together a very quick application especially if someone sends you a random CSV file or one of the particular formats S-Base can load. Hidden resources have a name that is enclosed in curly brackets.

Clicking Shift+Adjust on the Close icon of this window pops up the Application List window. S-Base is perfectly happy to edit more than one application at a time and this window displays the ones currently loaded.

This window has its own menu which allows specific operations to be carried on applications as a whole — the one we are after in particular is Application->Info (Figure V) which pops up a new dialogue box.

This allows you to alter basic information about the application including its name, all the type of information that appears in a standard Infobox from an iconbar icon menu and whether you want automatic backups running.

This is a very good thing, and I usually have it set up for fast backups, automatically doing a backup every 50 saves (I save manually very regularly) with a rolling backup of five versions.

The information held in this window is accessible using S-Base functions which means that it can be entered automatically into the applications Infobox if it has one.

The *Statistics* window contains information about how much memory is being used by the application and how it is divided up between applications while the *Settings* window is used in the *Network* version to control some features.

The resources

Now let's run through the different types of resource fairly rapidly, naturally I will go into more detail when we actually come to use them.

Files are the key resource to the whole application, if you get your files right everything else will follow logically. Each file contains a number of records and each record has fields containing data. S-Base allows very complex data structures to be created. Each file can also have any number of indexes which are used to access the records faster.

Relations are used to describe how records in different files are linked. These resources are not yet fully developed and since I created my own method of creating file relations a long time ago this is the system that I will use.

Templates are not the next ones in the list but need to be explained before *Formats*. A template is a low level description of how a window on screen should look. It contains all the RISC OS-level icons that are to appear in the window plus the details of how these icons respond to the mouse. It also contains the full RISC OS window description for the window size, scrollbars and so on.

This resource also manages the icons themselves. This may sound complex but it all has to do with maintaining a style within the application so that all the windows have a consistent look.

Formats are the next level up from *Templates* and allow the addition of non-RISC OS elements to a window. Such as scrolling lists, data fields, prompts, lines and boxes, sprites, drawfiles and so forth.

There are three types of format: A Card which is the typical window this is always based on a template; the Table which is a special type of Card which allows a scrolling list of records to be displayed; and the Report which is not based on a template and is used for creating printed results — although it can just be shown on screen if that is what you want.

To ease the design process it is possible to jump from a format directly to its template rather than having to go through the whole resource tree again. S-Base has a lot of little shortcuts to make it easier and faster to use.

Queries are resources which allow you to interrogate the database and come up with lists of records that match specific criteria. Queries can be hard-wired but can also be created on-the-fly which is very useful if you want to have user-defined criteria for searches.

Constants are a programming shortcut to let you define a name within the language to represent something, then you use the name within the application rather than some arbitrary number.

For example you might have a Constant resource called MAX_RULES and set it to 4. Wherever you want to refer to the maximum number of rules (currently 4) you put in MAX_RULES instead of the number 4. This has two effects: It makes the code easier to read

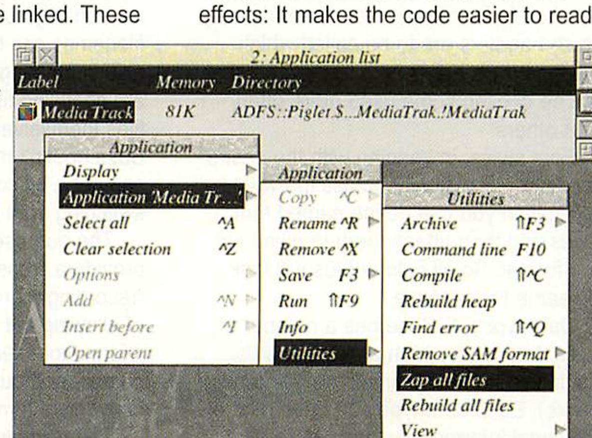


Figure V: S-Base possesses a huge number of special facilities for existing databases, some more dangerous than others

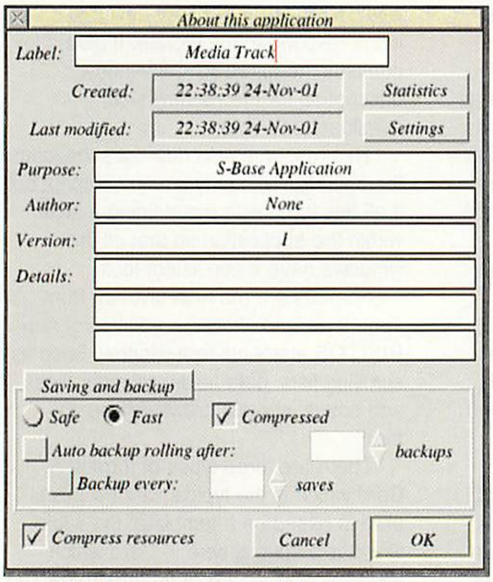


Figure VI: Backup options to ensure that you don't lose your hard-earned work

and if you want to change the maximum number of rules to 5 you simply alter the Constant resource to 5 and this will be used everywhere in the application from then on.

Programs contains special programming resource. When the application is first run a program resource called *Startup* is looked for and run. I use only this one, other program resources can be created and used but I have not needed them.

Handlers again needs to be cleared before *Handler sets*. S-Base creates event-driven applications, in other words you set things running and then the program just sits there until an event occurs. The system then looks through its event handlers to see if a handler has been attached to that particular event. If it has that piece of code (the handler) is run and things happen.

For example, clicking on a button in a window will generate and event and there should be an event handler for that particular event and something gets done.

Handler sets are groups of handlers attached to formats or menus and specify which handlers are to be called which events. There are quite a few events that can be chosen some used more often than others.

Font styles, in keeping with the desire to ensure consistency across the whole application you can define named font styles and then attach them to elements of a format. So all field entries will look the same for example.

Data types, S-Base has a number of basic data types, such as integers, floating point, dates, times, strings (and others). Each data type can have a lot of additional information attached it which control aspects of how it is displayed, what characters can be used as input to it and so on. This can get quite complicated bu the basics are simple.

Menus come in two types: Code and Pop-up. When the former is required a piece of code is run which figures out and creates the entries needed in the menu. A pop-up menu has pre-defined entries which can be given specific behaviour when clicked, such as running some code; popping up a window; or even displaying a sub-menu or sub-dialogue box.

You can also create menus on-the-fly within the application which is my usual approach. I only use predefined windows for the iconbar icon menu.

Procedures is where most of the work takes place. It is in here that you create the majority of the work code sensibly sub-divided into individual resources covering specific areas.

Sprites contains all the sprites used in the application whether for the icons or for display in format elements.

Finally drawings is for drawfiles which can also be displayed in format elements in a window.

What are we doing?

Having looked at the basic elements of S-Base let's now look in more detail at the program we are going to develop. It is very important in programming to clearly define the end result, what is we are actually trying to achieve.

From there we can break down the elements of the program so we can see what is necessary, and what is merely desirable. As this is a tutorial we won't be looking for the "best" solution necessarily only those things that help you understand how the language works.

So we have a name "MediaTrak" which is conveniently only 10 letters, while RISC OS 4 can easily handle more we want to be sure the program looks nice on any current system and truncated filenames can be problematic. This is also something to bear in mind when we are choosing filenames for the database files themselves. The latest version of S-Base doesn't mind long filenames but it can get a bit confused if you start switching from one to the other and back.

The purpose of MediaTrak is to provide a cross-referenced database of "recordings" on "media", with the purpose of allowing the user to input and edit information, search it under different criteria, and output the data in a convenient form.

The next step is to consider what types of data we have and how they relate to one another. We have already mentioned two: Media and Recordings. What do they actually mean in practical terms?

Media might be a video, commercial or personal, or it could be a CD, or a DVD, or even a CD-ROM. A recording could be a film, TV programme, music track, a computer application, even a set of tutorials stored as HTML on a CD. But let's not limit ourselves it could also be a file on the Internet (the Net is a storage medium after all).

Plus we will not use an archaic word like "recording", this is descriptive from one viewpoint but I personally dislike it, so we will use the term "object".

Beyond that are storage media that we haven't thought of yet. MediaTrak needs to be expandable so we will try not to put any limitation on what it can store. The same applies to what is stored as the programmer we try to avoid putting in too many limitations — we make the application as general as possible without making it unwieldy to use and without losing sight of the basic purpose.

There are the two essential types of information (media and objects) but we also want to be able classify the objects. For example, if our objects are videos perhaps we want to record their rating (Uc, U, PG, 12, 15, 18). We might want their type (Action, Adventure, Fantasy, Period and so on) which allows us to select a sub-list in the search facility.

So we will need a category section with entries and these have to be easily extendable by the user, and each category type ought to be associated with a media type — there is probably little use allowing an audio track to be labelled according to film ratings, it's more important to say that it is a graphics utility or a word processor.

There are lots of additions you could make, little tweaks here and there — I think a sensible one would be to allow a Web address to be associated with every object. This would be essential for Internet objects but most videos have a Web site as well and it is easy to launch a browser from S-Base, so we may as well.

While probably not very important in this particular application, most database programs keep back-ups and journals of what is happening to the database in case of crashes. We will see how this can be implemented as well.

That is it for this month. Next time we will look at the structure of this database, some limitations of S-Base and how to get around them, plus we will start looking at the actual coding itself and how to get an iconbar icon with a menu functioning.

END

BETT 2002 close-up

BETT 2002 offers you the chance to compare, test and assess the latest products and services from over 500 leading educational ICT suppliers. Along with the major policy makers in the *Policy in Practice* area, you can receive free advice and guidance to ensure you can make the most informed purchasing decisions for your establishment.

A host of new features will join established attractions at the event and together with the comprehensive INSET seminar programme you will be able to keep abreast of the most recent developments in your profession.

BETT is the longest running event in the UK's educational calendar and welcomed over 20,000 visitors from 76 countries last year.

BETT Awards Profile

BETT Awards aim to reward excellence in design and usage as well as to reflect achievement. Following nominations from schools and the industry, an expert panel shortlisted up to five products / services in each of the 12 categories ready to be voted for online.

Here is a glimpse at the runners and riders for this years online learning awards. Winners will be companies which have developed innovative ICT resources for the classroom and what is the teachers at the chalkface who vote simply by logging on to **www.bettawards.com**

The first nominations are for **Free Online Learning Resources**

Future Citizens – Educational Communications

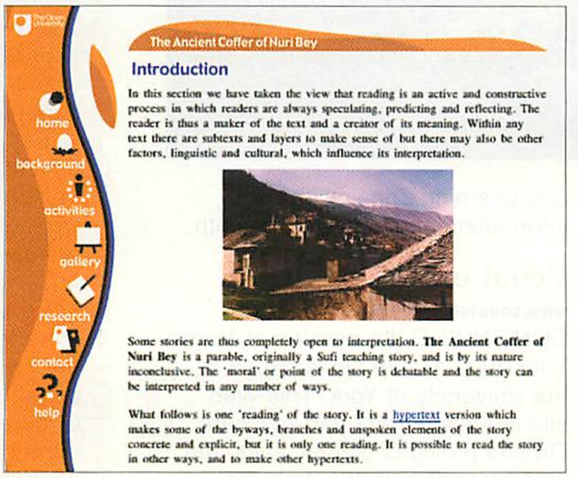
www.barnardos.org.uk/futurecitizens

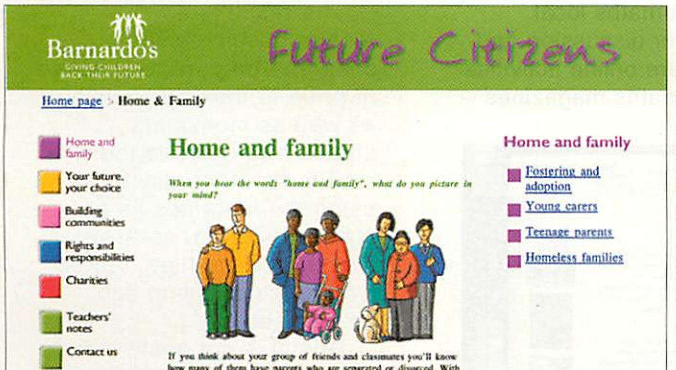
AIMED at young people. It is about the issues that affect young people in the UK today. The Web site will tell you about situations faced by all kinds of children and teenagers across the country. Home and family, charities, building communities, rights and responsibilities, your future your choice.

Moving Words – Open University

www.crete-ou.org/movingwords

AN INSET programme for Secondary English teachers focussing on focussing on literature from different cultures and traditions. Each of the six online workshops on offer is supported by a 2-hour departmental INSET plan, classroom ideas and online resource sections containing editable text files among other useful resources such as Web links and links to the software you'll need to access.





News bites

Softly does it

SOFTEASE ((+44/0) 135 343421) have added another title to its range of National Curriculum Resource Packs: Developing Literacy contains activities and teacher notes plus photocopiable pupil record sheets directly targeted at complying with the National Literacy Strategy.

The pack contains activities which use one or more parts of the Textease range and summarised how exercises and be used to achieve the learning objectives set out in the National Curriculum. In practice this means that there are a range of tasks ranging from early sorting and matching activities to complete lesson resources using the full range of Textease facilities and combining text, images, sounds and animations.

With the resource packs, teachers can access a large selection of on-screen materials for use in further work and extension opportunities. The CD-ROM also allows you to print out sheets relating directly to the exercises pupils can complete on screen. It is easy to navigate with section indexes listing tasks in alphabetical order and each index page includes a key to show whether the activity is based on word, text or sentence level work. A nice touch are the 'award templates' designed to motivate pupils. The cost is £29 each.

Express yourself

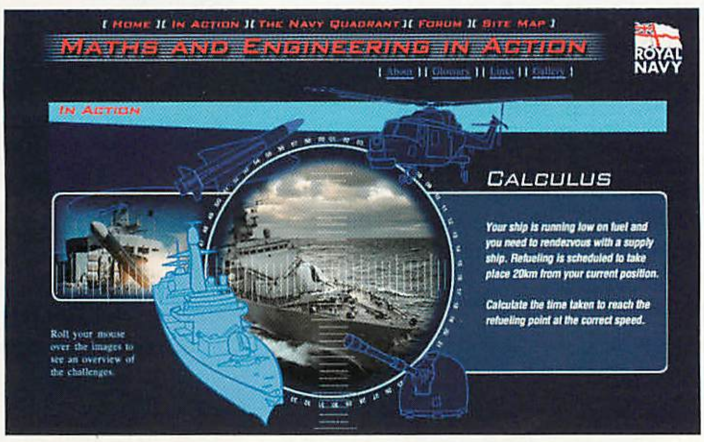
ESPRESSO EDUCATION ((+44/0) 20 8237 1200) have

For instance, you might want to explore prose through The Ancient Coffer of Nuri Bey through an open-ended hyptertext presentation, or poetry with a version of Pulsion or a slide show entitled Reflections and a pupil poem from draft to completion. Not assuming high ICT knowledge it will encourage by example the use of ICT in teaching and professional development.

Royal Navy & Royal Marines Service to Education

www.rn-maths.co.uk

FOCUSSES on students working on A/NVQ level Maths and aimed particularly at potential engineers and students who would be interested in technology apprenticeships with the Navy. Created against the backdrop of a national shortage of engineers this site aims to make the subject more alive by putting study into the context of real-life Naval engineering and operational scenarios targeting the subject of projectiles, vectors, calculus and probability. For the latter you are in control of the ships AAA Defender system designed to counter missile attacks from close range. The task is to find the most efficient use of the defence system – what is the least number of anti-missile shells to be fired to achieve the required number of hits that will destroy the missile. That's the setting and there are two levels of problem to solve.



Holnet: The Worshipful Company of Information Technologists

www.holnet.org.uk

THIS site divides into two sections at present; Victorian London and London at War 1939-45. The latter is the more complete of the two topics concentrating on what it was like in London during the Blitz and mirroring the History QCA document quite closely. As well as the Blitz, V1 flying bombs, food rationing and evacuation. Divided into four sections Air Raids, Daily Life, Children at War and Shelters containing photographs, paintings, posters, diaries, personal reflections and local newsletters from and about people in London. Victorian London consists of Snapshot 1890s is a look at the people and places of 12 London boroughs while a second section is being developed and will be a history of the London School Board 1870 to 1914 and what it was like to be at school during this time. Both areas divide into Teaching and Learning Zones with information and activities for both.

Count on

www.counton.org

CONTINUING the mission of Maths Year 2000, Count On is based at the University of York. This Web site is an important part of Count On and provides games, links, fun and interactive maths, help for GCSE and A level students as well as information on maths local events. A forum for discussion and resources there are online activities including online maths magazines –



been working with Bristol's Education Action Zone to compile a series of programmes entitled 'Bristol a fe me' or 'Bristol is for me'. Centered in the Afro-Caribbean, Asian and Somali communities it includes specially recorded video footage which is integrated into a unique module featuring carefully researched Web sites and local resources to produce a multimedia resource bank that addresses specific curriculum areas.

Celebrating the richness and diversity of Bristol it has been a partnership between schools, businesses and the community with the joint aim of improving education and awareness. Designed to widen the learning resources for pupils in central Bristol so that they are culturally diverse and reflect the experiences and life stories of this multi-ethnic community.

Espresso has also collated information on local museums and libraries as well as talking to local residents with local businesses about how they got started. Local people were interviewed about their backgrounds and how they came to live in Bristol. Children have also contributed with their own work including video footage.

The result is a rich resource which gives children and parents a sense of pride in their community as well as motivating students to improve their standards of literacy by using the materials as a starting point for creative writing, biographies, report writing, story telling and presentations.

Bristol is not going to be alone in the limelight for long as Espresso are involved in

Why use lazy old FAT clients, when you can have fast and efficient THIN clients?

Management

Control is centralised in a TotalBoot NC installation, making it easy to manage and providing a secure, tamper-proof environment. Because all software and configurations are controlled by the central TotalBoot server, the NC does not allow pupils to alter application settings and viruses cannot be introduced. Central management also saves time as the ICT co-ordinator will no longer have to move from machine to machine, solving individual problems. Furthermore, when the server is upgraded, all stations are instantly upgraded.

Applications

Along with curriculum content and communications applications, TotalBoot NC installations can run Windows™ and Acorn RISC OS applications, providing access to a range of industry standard and education specific software titles.

All NC TotalBoot installations come with NC Works - an integrated productivity suite including word processor, spreadsheet, database, graphing tool, drawing tool, painting package and JavaScript Web browser. Our NCs provide access to all the core ICT tools in an easy-to-use environment.

See us on Stand D10 at BETT 2002



Access

TotalBoot NC installations provide Internet access and e-mail for all stations - the communications tools needed to plug into the National Grid for Learning. A wealth of curriculum material provides a powerful intranet learning resource. In addition, TotalBoot NC installations come with Interchange which provides a curriculum index link to the World Wide Web, ensuring pupils have access to stable, educationally moderated and relevant sites.

Integration

TotalBoot NCs can be integrated into an existing ICT infrastructure protecting the school's investment and extending the lifespan of resources. Old PCs, including 386s and 486s, can be used as thin-clients, giving a new lease of life to legacy systems.

NCs can be connected to networks of different platforms, run the same applications as existing desktop PCs and integrate seamlessly with established standards.



Cost Effective

As all files and applications are managed centrally, NCs do not require hard discs, floppy drives or CD-ROM drives on each terminal. This gives dramatic savings on unit costs. Expensive NT servers are not obligatory.

Because NCs have no moving parts, there is little that can go wrong. With PCs, most technical support requirements stem from changing user settings. Because this does not apply to NCs technical support is dramatically reduced. As a result, there are savings on repair bills and on costs associated with downtime and disruptions to teaching schedules.



NC Base

- ARM 7500FE NC
- TotalBoot NT/NetManager ready
- 16MB Memory
- Keyboard and Logitech Mouse
- Network Cable

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NC 15″

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- 15″ SVGA Monitor
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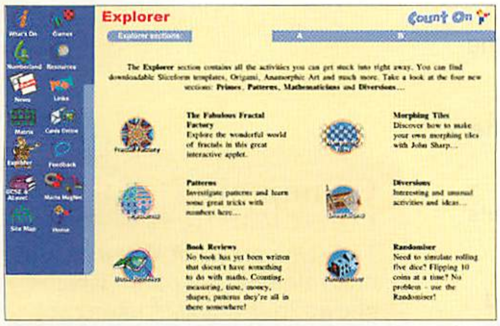
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Meenie Minus and Kaleidoscope. These consist of a selection of online games and activities for Key Stage 1 upwards such as 'The less than lake' where you help a monster cross the lake and it even provides a numberline in an extra window if you need it.

For the award: **Subscription Online Learning Resources**

The Guardian – Secondary Topical Lessons

www.learn.co.uk

EVERY week this site presents two topical lesson packs – one each for Key Stages 3 and 4. The lessons are based on contemporary articles from the Guardian and the Observer and are supported by specially written Key Stage 3 and 4 features. Access is available on



subscription though you can register for a 30-day free trial. For instance, one week's stories consisted of Football Crazy for Key Stage 3 asking the question 'Is the money from TV revenues having too big an influence on British football?' While Key Stage 4 were presented with Under the veil, asking whether the burka symbolises the oppression of women in Afghanistan? The lesson pack provides images and information allowing students to put both sides of the argument about clothing and freedom. Looking at the burka as a symbol of the oppression of women in Afghanistan, students analyse how opinions on this controversial topic can be expressed. They will also have an opportunity to improve skills in dealing with difficult subject matter in writing and debate supported by weblinks, further readers and teachers' notes.

Paradigm-ICT – CR-ed Online Content Family

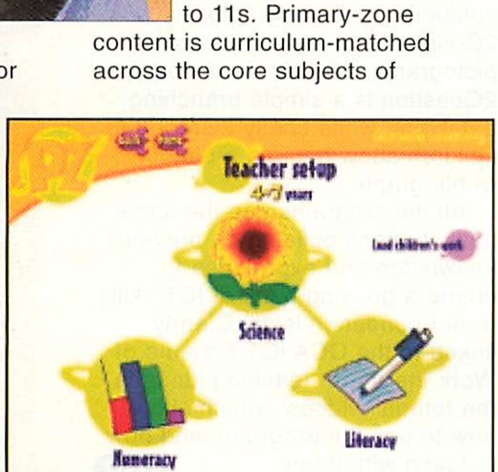
www.schoolgrid.net

THIS site provides access to a range of weekly online magazines aimed at Key Stage 1 onwards. CR-ed are family online magazines – CR-ed, CR-ed Plus, CR-ed francais and CR-ed Cyrmu. Topics and content are varied from Harry Potter, to Ant and Dec, Tomb Raider, and the FA Cup and come with curriculum links. For instance, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, as well as The Lord of the Rings, presents a literacy writing challenge, while the latest football result is turned into a numeracy activity.

Granada Learning: Primary Zone

www.granadalearning.co.uk

AIMED at schools and families the aim is to help children learn using the Internet by providing access to almost 100 educational and fun activities. The learning environment is structured with two interfaces to meet the needs of 4 to 7-year olds and another for the 8 to 11s. Primary-zone content is curriculum-matched across the core subjects of



other 'Your Espresso' schemes with projects in Birmingham, Plymouth and Sunderland. Any LEA or EAZ can apply to have a 'Your Espresso' module created for their schools as an add-on module for those subscribing to Espresso for Primary Schools' broadband service or can be delivered on CD-ROM for non-subscribers.

On the boards

AS interactive whiteboards become more and more popular in schools, Nelson Thornes, (www.nelsonthornes.com) have released resources which can be used simply in the classroom. For instance, Soundsalive, which has been developed specifically to teach phonics on any whiteboard.

Based on the stories and characters that feature in the Soundstart books and CD-ROMs they can be used independently. Designed for whole class use, there are enlarged screen icons and interactive displays for all to see and join in with. The material covers key phonics objectives for Foundation level and offers a range of activities including interactive games.

In addition, Primary ICT CD-ROMs have been produced to teach ICT on a whiteboard. Reportedly easy to use with a clear menu system, brightly coloured, animated characters and stimulating sounds bring teaching ideas to life and create an interactive display that the whole class can see and use. Exercises are a mix of drag and drop, to point and click, choosing, matching and categorizing activities among others.

Show details

When?

Wednesday 9th Jan	10:00am-6:00pm
Thursday 10th Jan	10:00am-6:00pm
Friday 11th Jan	10:00am-6:00pm
Saturday 12th Jan	10:00am-4:30pm

Where? Olympia, London
Details? www.bettshow.com
Contact? 0870 429 4574 (free registration and seminar tickets)

Numeracy, Literacy and Science. Teachers can configure the age, subject and activities available at any time. Resources are supported by teachers' notes and guidance for use within the Numeracy and Literacy Strategies, with the activities are fully matched to the QCA Schemes of Work. Prices start at £59 for schools with the home version separate yet mirroring the content of the school version.

Proquest Information and Learning – Proquest Learning History and Literature

www.proquestlearning.co.uk

PROQUEST Learning: Literature contains, among others, The Concise Oxford Dictionary, C.T. Onions' renowned Shakespeare Glossary and the King James Bible. All supporting case studies, study units and detailed articles, 900 plays, 100,000 poems as well as links and resources. While the Atlas of British History, the Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing as well as English Historical Documents are some of the volumes featured found in ProQuest Learning: History.

Familiar images such as Elizabeth's 'Armada portrait' are set alongside the unfamiliar – Babur, the first Mughal Emperor of India in the picture gallery, but all are placed in context with detailed captions. A video library provides newsreel footage of Dublin in ruins after the 1916 Easter Rising, the 1963 civil rights march on Washington or Hitler and Chamberlain signing the Munich Agreement.

Then there are Web links and resource pages and study units devoted to the historical topics most studied at Key Stages 3 and 4, from Elizabethan England to the Vietnam War. For example, a student working on the English Civil Wars will find accounts of the impeachment of Strafford and Charles's execution and a selection of contemporary portraits among other items. Meanwhile both sites can be searched for particular documents. Idexes and learning discussion groups aim to support both teacher and student.

As well as the online resources, there are also awards for Educational Software (Primary), Educational Software (Secondary), Software Tools (Primary), Software Tools (Secondary), Further Education, ICT Hardware (Primary), ICT Hardware (Secondary), Support for ICT, Special Education Needs (Software) and School Management Solutions.

No BETT Awards would be complete without the presence of certain companies. Softease is one of these with *Textease Studio* in the Software Tools (Primary) section competing against the likes of other old favourites Blackcat and Sherston

However, they are not alone this year as newcomer 2Simple Software's ((+44/0) 20 8203 1781) Infant Video Toolkit has been nominated for two awards this year – Best Software Tool and Best Education Software both in the primary categories.

2Simple's IVT is a suite of six programs specially designed to teach ICT skills to pre-readers or those who speak English as an additional language: 2Paint is a simple drawing program; 2Publish combines text and graphics; 2Count for survey results as pictograms; 2Go for basic control; 2Question is a simple branching database; while finally 2Graph lets children show data as a bar, line or pie graph.

All the programs use the same basic buttons building on previous knowledge and experience to create a growing bank of ICT skills from Foundation level. Clearly linked to the QCA ICT Scheme of Work there are teaching ideas in the tutorial 'videos', which show how to use the programs and how to teach with them. END

Community consciousness

THE University of Warwick has released research which shows that Internet users got to church more often and are more likely to belong to voluntary organisations than non-computer users. The research has been conducted by Professor Andrew Oswald and Dr Jonathan Gardner who report that contrary to the stereotypical young male loner who prefers meeting virtual friends rather than the real thing, the internet user is most likely to be young, male and sociable.

Almost a third of users belong to a community group which around half are likely to be regular church goers. Professor Andrew Oswald commented on his conclusions: "They don't leave out their friends and family because they spend time hunched over their computer – they simply watch less television."

The research also noted that while a third make personal use of the Internet there is a huge divide in who does and does not surf. Those with money and education are far more likely to use the Net than those without. Almost 61 per cent of those earning £32,000 per annum make personal use of the Internet, compared with just 9 per cent of those earning between £6,000 and £12,000.

Among graduates around 72 per cent use the Internet in this way, but only 9 per cent of those with no qualifications do so. More men – 40 per cent – use the Internet than women at 28 per cent and these men surf for longer too on average 3.5 hours compared with 2.5 hours a week.

Rambles

Mike Cook buys another round for RISC OS users

Have you subscribed to RISC OS Select? I have been giving this some careful thought over the last few month. The problem is just exactly what do you want from an operating system. Is it a better desktop environment with cool graphics and handy tools? Or is it something more fundamental, the way the computer operates.

In the RISC OS world we have been starved of new releases of operating systems for some time, so the Desktop can look weary and tardy. So in that respect the Select program is welcome. However, I can see little of fundamental change in the releases.

Changing the operating system has always been a major cause of stress and frustration, as you know it is much less stressful on our platform than the Macintosh and it is nearly fatal in stress effects on a Microsoft platform. In fact on those machines it rates higher than bereavement, divorce and moving house. However easy we have it, there are bound to be casualties.

The way it works is that you put up with the old operating system until the pain of not being able to run so much new software is unbearable and you have to upgrade. To that end there has been little drive among RISC OS users because by and large most things were compatible after an upgrade.

Perhaps the most important thing from a programmers point of view was the ability to allocate chunks of memory from a common pool that came along with OS 3.5. There were ways round it on earlier systems but they were messy. That's the sort of fundamental change I was referring to, they're not glamorous and people don't immediately see why they are useful, but they are vital to the growth of our platform and produce software that is not backwardly compatible.

So RISCOS Ltd face a dilemma when deciding how to develop our operating system, too fundamental and it gets ignored as having no general appeal, too superficial and it attracts only users not programmers. I'm glad it's not my decision.

Having said all that remember last month when Alex Candlish had a problem with his Zip drive and RISC OS 4. The RISC OS support e-mailed him to say "This is a standard problem with AlSystems SCSI cards. You must unplug the DOSMount module from the SCSI card." Well Alex wrote to say:

I **"Many thanks for your endeavours to solve my problem, sadly I am using a Parallel Zip drive but I gave it a try anyway to no avail. I have resorted to snail mail to Partis and Alsystems to see if they will at least reply. If anything useful arrives I will pass it on if useful."**

I did pass this on to RISC OS support but so far, after four weeks, there has been a thundering silence.

Dave Braine has also got problems with the new operating system:

Q **"I've just had my Risc PC upgraded to RISC OS 4 and Strong-arm. The only application that won't work is Colton's *Pipedream 4*. Can you assist, as I can't find a contact number for Colton and the RISC OS 4 help line rings a fax number?**

"Pipedream loads on to the iconbar as usual. If I attempt to load an existing file, I get an illegal instruction error, with click OK to exit and cancel to attempt to continue. Both of these work. From the iconbar menu. I can create a new page. When I try to type in the page, I get the same error message.

"If I then select 'Cancel to attempt to continue' and then click with the mouse in the page, the letter that I typed appears. That page can be saved in the normal manner. Your help would be appreciated as I use it as a back up for my flying logbook and there is over six years worth at the moment."

A Once more I queried RISC OS support and I got this back: *Pipedream* is looked after by Gerald Fitton. Version 4.5 certainly works. Try **www.abacusline.demon.co.uk**

Now just to show that Acorn machines do get everywhere we have Stéphan Desrochers, Ph.D., Professeur agrégé, Université Laval, Québec who writes:

Q **"I have an Acorn Risc PC 600. I would like to buy a device that will allow me to copy my entire hard disk, because with floppy diskettes, it is a little bit too long!"**

A Well the best answer here would appear to be a tape streamer, but I am not sure if anyone provides the software to drive these on our machines. So as a next best thing I would suggest a simple CD writer, sure the media is not rewritable but with blanks costing less than 40p it is cheap enough. The advantage of the write-once only option is that you have an audit trail of you work. However, if you do want it then there are rewritable CDs available. Try to arrange the data that changes to be stored in just a few folders to make it easier to cope with. As an alternative you could have an external SCSI hard drive

and back up to that.

Next a frustrated call from Paul Walsh as to why we are not winning any wars hands down:

Q "Why is it that the rest of the world can't see the benefits of RISC OS? Surely ARM technology has been licensed to many companies and many ARM powered products are out there, so why isn't RISC OS more well known? Is it hiding there hidden in all the set-top boxes, printers and mobile phones? Why don't we see it in personal organisers?"

A It is true that ARM cores have been licensed to many silicon producers of embedded solutions but many of these cores do not have a MMU (Memory Management Unit). This is hardware that does a hardware address bus remapping so that the processor thinks it is addressing one memory location where as it is actually addressing another. This ability is fundamental to the design of RISC OS and limits what hardware RISC OS can be ported to.

Second is the problem of 32 / 24-bit compatibility. The original ARM chips used the top byte of the program counter to store status bits. On later chips these bits are used as address lines and there is a separate status register with extra instructions to access it. The conversion to 32 bit compatibility is on hold although new ways forward are actively being sought.

Many of the new ARM chips (the ones with MMUs) can't work in the old 24-bit mode. The result of this is that many embedded processor solutions use other operating systems like VXworks, Nucleus, Green Hills and Psos. While these are not familiar names to most desktop computer users, these are big names in the embedded industry and charge serious money.

It is these operating system that are in the major embedded uses of ARM chips. The Omega computer attempts to break these problems by placing a hardware abstraction layer around the processor, this is not a cheap solution or viable for a mass consumer product. Incidentally the dreaded Windows operating system needs an MMU as well, that's why there is Windows CE. So while the ARM processor is wonderful and RISC OS is the cuddly friendly beast we know and love one does not always imply the other.

Malcolm Churchill is having trouble turning his machine on, he writes:

Q "When I turn on or reset my Risc PC I have a 30 second wait with just a flashing cursor on screen before the Boot starts with the RISC OS 4 - Memory info and Podules info appearing. Then there is a 10 second delay before the 4.24 softloading message appears.

"This is follow by another 30 seconds of blank screen plus cursor before all proceeds as I would expect. I have no ADFS devices (connecting the CD-ROM drive makes no difference) as my HDs are on a RapIDE ATAFS interface. Is this the cause of the delay?

"The delay becomes much shorter (about 5 to 10 seconds) if I put a HD on ADFS. But I don't want another HD there! Can I eliminate the delay in another way? It wasn't so obvious when it was just one 30 second delay under RISC OS 4.02, but two lots of delay is more of a nuisance. Thanks for any suggestions."

A You might have an extra hard drive configured and so the computer is looking for one for some time before it gives up. If so, match your configuration to the number of drives you have. Also look at the spin-up delay, see if that is set too long. Finally it could be looking for a network connection although this is unlikely if you get less delay when you put a hard drive on it.

Penultimately, to those of you who like to post to the newsgroups, I found this message recently and perhaps it is something we need to be reminded of:

I "This is a weekly introductory posting intended to aid newcomers to the newsgroups in finding the right place to post, where the various FAQs lurk and general conventions observed in the groups.

"For reader convenience this document can be found on the WWW, in a hypertext format, at: www.geocities.com/~banksp/Archives/Welcome.html

"The Comp.Sys.Acorn newsgroups are dedicated to the discussion of all matters Acorn. Before launching into the groups it is worthwhile spending a moment or two identifying which newsgroup to post to, whether or not your question has been answered already in one of the FAQ lists and whether or not your post conforms to the general guidelines that constitute netiquette.

"Failure to check on the appropriateness of your post generally results in you being reminded, frequently politely, of your mistake — both publicly and privately."

And finally: One of the most important aspects of the changes to Acorn User that are now taking place is that we will be getting many more words on every page. That means that I have more room to answer your questions.

So if there is anything about your RISC OS computer – or even the technology world in general – I am here to get the answers to your questions if I can, and to find someone who can answer it if I can't.

You can send your queries in by e-mail or by normal post to the usual address. Just ask.

END

Contacting AU

Mike Cook:
rambles@acornuser.com

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• Looking for a second slice for Risc PC. Also a sound card. Any ideas? E-mail: **rhodribritton@t-online.de**

• Various spares, interfaces, cables, ROM's & odd bits for BBC B upto Risc PC. Nothing over £20. E-mail: **redsocks@btinternet. com** for list.

• Risc PC SA233, 1GB HD, 21MB RAM, Single-slice, RPM 1-5, Pipedream4, Impression, Style, MIDI, boxed, excellent condition; A3010, 4MB, HCCS, 80MB HD, HiVision24, A/D, boxed, excellent condition. David Francis 07973 796873 (Congleton, Cheshire)

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Ugh! It's ik!

I was very disappointed to read about your mention of **schools.ik.com** on page 51 of the Christmas issue of *Acorn User*. They do not support Acorns and any attempts to get them to do so have been met with insults or misinformation. Their system is extremely poorly designed, insecure and slow.

When I suggested (in response to a comment of theirs) that "...That's obviously wrong. A lot more than 0.1% of schools have Acorns..."

Their answer was: "Yes, more than 0.1% of schools do use Acorns, but if they do, they're not potential users of our software, because the Schools Internet Kit has never been guaranteed to work on the Acorn platform.

"The reality is that Acorns are being replaced in schools because not one pupil in ten thousand will go on to use an Acorn in their professional working life. Just about every single one will come into contact with a Windows PC or Apple Macintosh and have to use it.

"It's a fact that schools and companies such as yourself have to take into account. I refer back to the fact that none of our commercial customers operate an Acorn. They are approximately 95% Windows PC and 5% Apple Macintosh and all run MS IE or Netscape Navigator, both of which work with our product. A few operate Unix and Linux boxes and have reported no issues.

"We never set out to make the Schools Internet Kit work on the Acorn, and until demand rises significantly we won't. Having said that, no plans are in place to modify or prepare for Acorn users because we can't seriously think that the Acorn's market share in any sector, let alone schools, will rise."

Well, as a commercial company, we don't agree and we have a product of our own. **SurfYourOwn.com** is a new venture set up by Precedence and Surftec. It will work on any tables HTML 3.2 compliant browser. It's at an early stage at the moment, but we intend to make it an IK beater.

Stephen Borrill, Precedence
sborrill@precedence.co.uk

We want information

From the very next issue we are re-designing and re-launching Acorn User with its new editor and editorial team (still keeping your popular regulars and bringing back some of your old favourites).

We have already issued a survey to on the Acorn newsgroups but we know that many of you either don't have an Internet connection, and don't read the newsgroups even if you have. We want to know what you think too.

So fill in the attached survey and send it back to us as fast as possible so that your opinions are taken into consideration.

We thought you would like to see what some of the respondees have already written about what they hope for *Acorn User* in the future, and we want you to let us know what you think about that. As these were responses to a survey we have taken the liberty of stitching the answers together to make them more readable but we hope the intent has not been altered.

Brian Hogg: I only like articles related to Acorns, I really don't like negative letters to the editor or any sort of negative comments and articles. Give me reviews, news, technical articles and information. Also the ads are very important.

Bring back *INFO (or some sort of user/reader input); Promote programming (Basic, C, Fortran and so on); Articles on old Acorns, not just history but usable data for those getting the computers running again.

Please don't reduce the typeface size. New Scientist has a smaller typeface and that is OK as long as I use my reading glasses.

Definitely NO to changing the name. Although the newsgroups won't say the word "Acorn", an Acorn is what I have. The name has a history of covering all of the old computers from System 1 onwards, 8-bit and 32-bit included. As time goes on, the older computers will become more significant.

It is not just about today's and tomorrow's computers. *Acorn User* has an identity. Admittedly it is a bit tarnished at present but it needs the content enhancing and the price reducing a little. If you do change the name readers will loose their allegiance to it. Don't rename it, just change it to what we want.

Good luck.

John Crane: I want to read PD, news, equipment/software tests and reviews. Hints & Tips pages. And bring back The Regan files

I would like you to bring back the cover CD, or at least a floppy or two, with shareware PD stuff on and so on. I keep these and often go back to them years after and retrieve some little utility, which I've just decided may be useful. I'm not interested in downloading stuff from your Web site — I want a hard copy I can 'dip' into when I feel like it.

I feel that the overall quality needs looking at. For example, in two recent issues, there was a competition running and nowhere on the form did it say where to send your entry.

Why is it assumed readers will be e-mailing you? Some may wish to write, I think you should put names and snail-mail addresses, as well as e-mail ones.

I don't want Acorn User to disappear, we need a magazine in the shops to promote RISC OS to all.

I wish you every success and would really like to see Acorn User back at the top as the Flagship Acorn / RISC OS magazine .

Wendy Gray: I really don't like the education articles: I'm a teacher and I'm afraid I don't find them inspiring. This could be improved by a more exciting and enthusiastic style. Factual data, such as NC/QCA references would be useful for a teacher, in a chart. Ideas for how best to use a program (with permission to photocopy for one's colleagues) would help subject co-ordinators especially in Primary schools.

And what about interesting parents to buy the product for the offspring? What about aiming a section at the kids themselves? We all

know the persuasive powers of a child in 'I want' mode!

I like the articles written by knowledgeable folk who can interest a wide ranging audience, for example, Neil Farnham-Smith, Paul Vigay, Sendu Bala, John Cartmell and David Dade. There has to be enough for the boffins, but also enough for the non-programming user. I used to love reading the old 'Mad Hatter' pages as they were entertaining.

I think we need articles that show how to use software, not just comments on the features provided — perhaps a simple project to follow?

Look back at the old Micro User and Acorn User and Acorn Computing mags from the early 1990's - they were "a good read".

Perhaps information on downloading specific types of material from the Net, for example MP3 stuff, perhaps written by the authors (who are kind enough to keep us in free software). News about developments, explanations of techie stuff that I can understand, ideas, explanations of common problems, a sense of community...

As far as renaming the magazine is concerned, many companies have found recently, 'rebranding' is often an expensive mistake! People identify with a brand and there is an element of product loyalty. A household name becomes part of the psyche: I still look for Opal Fruits and Marathon bars on the shelf, can never remember what they are called now. Likewise its still British Gas, the GPO and so on.

If the logo is a strong element (as were the BBC Micro 'Owl' and the beautifully simple 'Acorn', or even the cute Linux penguin) it is a mistake to change it — as a British airline company discovered!

Any image or name would need to be easy to identify, catchy and take account of the fact that RISC OS is an umbrella for a few computer manufacturers now.

John Graham: In my opinion, to produce a magazine to please everyone is impossible. Users range from beginners to full time professional's working on all platforms.

I think the name Acorn should be dropped from a newsstand magazine. It conjures up notions of BBC computers and so on, and will not attract users from other platforms. With new computers, RON and the like, waiting in the wings, we really need a forward looking magazine.

To try and please a large section of readers I suggest that contents are still categorised with headings (Graphics, Comms and so on) as at present, but each section should contain news, reviews, learning articles and PD related to that specific heading. That would be a pretty full magazine every month.

Too much is taken for granted by those in the know. For example, monitors are quoted as A x B resolution at N MHz, but what does this mean? Will this monitor suit my machine? If I upgrade to Kinetic, will I have to buy a different monitor?

These sorts of questions could be dealt with in a Hardware Column alongside a review of Monitors for example. Plus apps for calibrating monitors. I also feel that the magazine should be made more attractive to other platform users.

However, there is a section of our community who act like people who think the British are White and Christian, and make snide remarks about those who are not. Not the best way to make friends and influence people. So let us come into the real world and have articles on networking and the rest.

By all means highlight areas where our platform excels (Vantage, ease of use) so that PC users might be inclined to investigate our platform further.

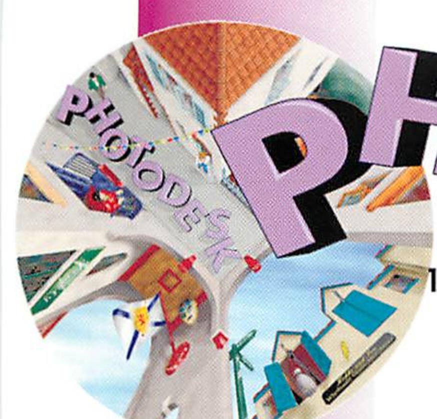
At present there seems little substance in the magazine. Headlines too big, irrelevant pictures filling up space, and poor sub-editing of spelling. It could be so much better. When you look at the bizarre titles of magazines on a well-stocked newsagent, you wonder who might buy them, yet new editions appear monthly. Acorn User could be the flagship of the RISC user community. Good luck! I welcome your initiative.

Acorn User Survey

1. Do you buy Acorn User currently?
2. What articles do you least like in Acorn User?
3. What articles/features do you not like at all in Acorn User?
4. What articles/features do you most like in Acorn User?
5. What improvements do you think should be made to Acorn User?
6. Why do you buy Acorn User?
7. What other Acorn publications do you buy?
8. Why do you buy them?
9. What information do you get from a RISC OS magazine?
10. Would you object to a smaller typeface in Acorn User?
11. What thing best represents:
   a) Acorn User?
   b) RISC OS?
   c) Acorn?
12. What colour best represents:
   a) Acorn User?
   b) RISC OS?
   c) Acorn?
13. Do you think the Acorn User name should be changed?
   a) If no, why not?
   b) If yes, what names do you think are appropriate?
14. Any other comments you would like to make?

Please fill in your answers on a seperate piece of paper and send your anwsers to: Acorn User Survey, Tau Press Ltd, 28a Middle Hillgate, Stockport SK1 3AY

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